November Newsletter

Last month's Speaker Mhairi MacLauchlan

Red Necked Phalarope: Liz Harrison

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John Lumby

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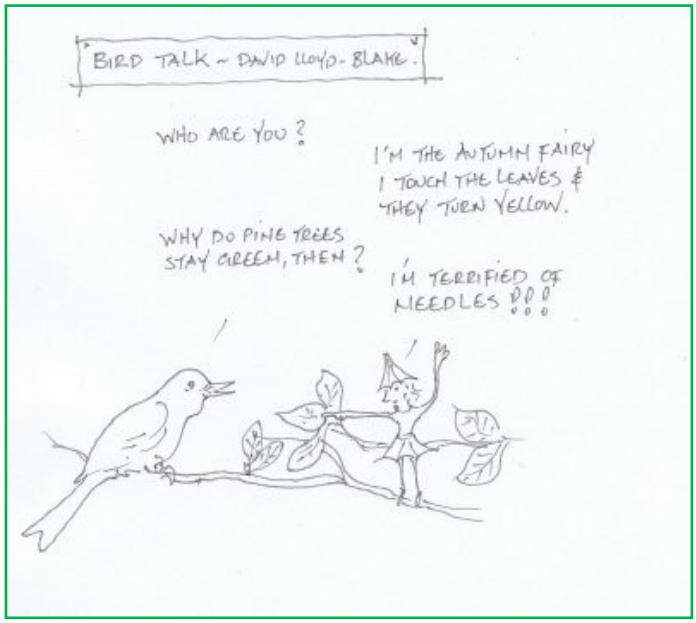

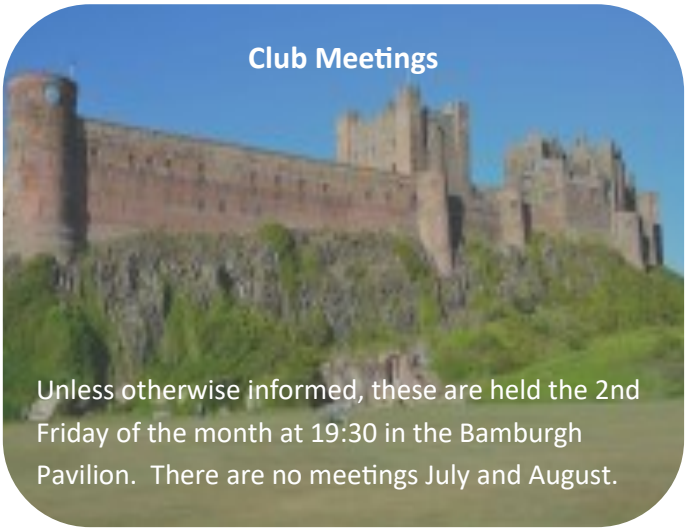

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On our Facebook page at:
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"Until you spread your wings; you'll have no idea how far you can fly " (Napoleon Bonaparte)

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

A separate email to members contains the Agenda for the AGM, Minutes of the 2022 AGM , 2022/2023 Accounts and both the Chairman and Treasurer Reports

Upcoming Field Trips

Sunday 19th November 2023
Holy Island Leader: Alan Goodall
Meet at the Snook carpark at 9.30 am grid reference NU105434. Safe crossing time is 09:25 to 16:55. Proposal is we arrange to car share at the Snook before heading to main car park to minimise the parking charges, which are: 3hrs £6, 4hrs £7, 5hrs £8, All day £9.50

It is difficult to predict the time involved as our speed will be determined by the slowest walker and how many birds we see. 3 hours will NOT be enough so 4 or 5 hours would be the best guess, leaning towards 5 - taking into account lunch. Maybe some members may wish to leave the walk early in which case they should advise the leader accordingly. For anyone not wishing to take a picnic lunch, pubs and cafes are available in the village.

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, or directly with Leaders for the event.

See web site for details of other Field Trips

Upcoming Meetings

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

Friday 8th December at 19:30
Northumberland's Goshawks with Martin Davison (along with seasonal refreshments)

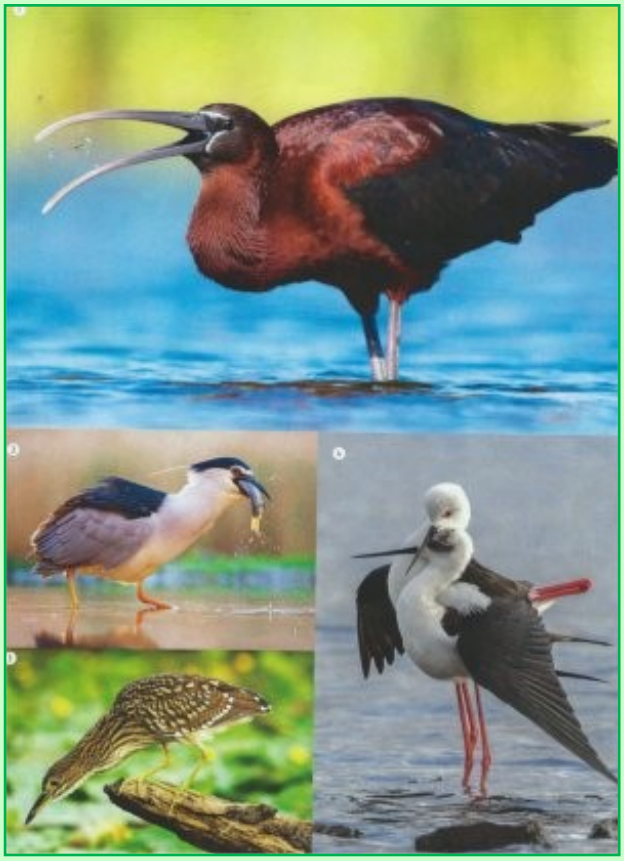
See web site for details of other Meetings

Noticeboard

Membership Subscriptions are now overdue

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

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. 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. 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

RSPB reserves on the Cumbrian Coast , with Mhairi MacLauchlan

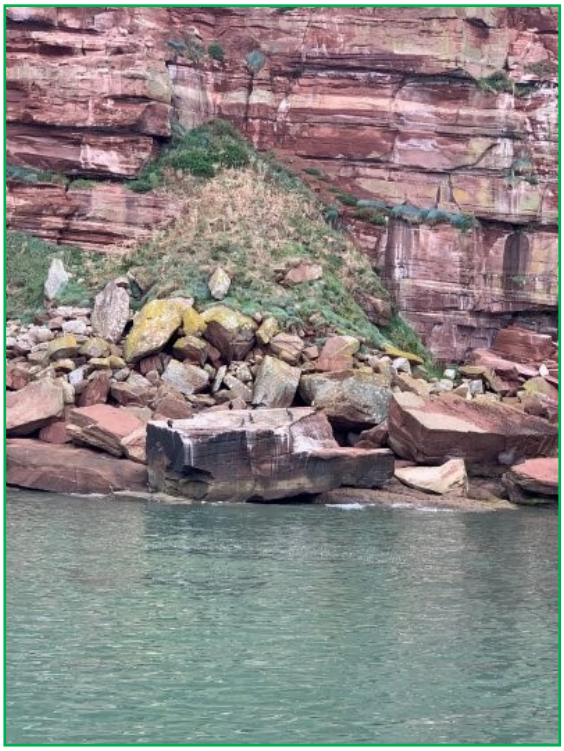
Our October 13th Guest Speaker was Mhairi MacLachlan, Reserve Warden at Cumbria's Coastal Reserves. Some members already know Mhairi from when she was based on Lindisfarne NNR working for the RSPB on the EU Life Little Tern Project at sites on the Northumberland Coast. With a background in Conservation and Environmental Management she has also worked at a number of sites including RSPB Blacktoft Sands, Coquet Island and Holyhead. Since 2017 she has been Reserve Warden at Cumbria's Coastal Reserves.

The Cumbrian Coast is divided into three reserves: Campfield Moss, St Bees Head, and Hodbarrow- it is a two hour trip from Campfield Marsh in the North to Hodbarrow!

Campfield Moss is situated on the Solway Coast near the end of the Hadrian's Wall walk. Originally farmland, it now comprises a variety of habitats: wet grassland, farmland, saltmarsh and peat bogs. Some of the areas are SSSIs, which is hoped can be extended into the farmland. The region has important peat bogs which abut farmed areas. Some farms have been bought, with the objective of encouraging Pink Footed Geese. Wetland and bogs have been restored by blocking drains, linking up pools and sluices to the Solway and installing a dynamic water management system, which has greatly increased the predominance of both breeding and passage waders (see before and after photos). This has entailed considerable work by Reserve staff and farmers (encouraged currently by Stewardship grants) and has included muck spreading, rush cutting and rotavating - the results being obvious from drone footage within a relatively short period of time.

Six km of permanent predator fencing was erected to deter foxes, badgers, people and dogs! Temporary electric fences are erected during the breeding season. Species now using the area include Ruff, Wigeon and Black Tailed Godwits. Bog rehabilitation is succeeding with annual increase in Sphagnum, sedges, grasses and phragmites. Many bird species benefit including Nightjars (for the first time), Reed Buntings, Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers and the first breeding pair of Marsh Harrier for 150 years!

Speaker's Presentation



The Solway area is an important wintering ground for an estimated 42,000 Barnacle Geese, but during the 2021 Avian flu outbreak there were 13,000 deaths. Numbers currently show signs of recovery.

St Bees Head

This reserve is mainly red sandstone cliff and hosts seabirds such as Guillemot, Fulmar, Razorbill - and one Puffin! Kittiwake productivity fluctuates, the reason for this being unclear.

Birds are monitored from the sea and there are three visitor viewpoints. The sandstone is prone to landslides, creating crevices and niches favoured by nesting Black Guillemot -their only nesting site in the UK!

Hodbarrow

This is the most Southerly of the reserves situated on the site of what was formerly one of the world's biggest iron ore mines, closed in 1968. In 1986 the RSPB bought 105 acres for the management of wildlife in what is a genetically diverse area.

A huge sea wall had originally been constructed to stop the land flooding but this was allowed to breach so a large lagoon remains and in the absence of industry, nature has reclaimed the land. The reserve hosts one of the most important tern colonies in the North West. Sandwich, Common, Arctic and Little Terns breed here. Nesting Little Terns habitually favour shallow scrapes in sand and shingle. However, those which nest at Hodbarrow favour the silica rich limestone slag, the by-product of the iron ore mines. This provides excellent camouflage, is sheltered and close to the water but requires occasional maintenance from Reserve staff in replacing the loose slag. Despite a healthy number of pairs productivity has been low, necessitating more intervention to deter predators such as fox (a fence installed in the water) and gulls which are scared off by lasers in the hope that productivity increases. Rats are currently problematic.

Speaker's Presentation

Ringing of Sandwich, Common and Little Terns began in 2017, providing fascinating data regarding their journeys from far afield including Namibia, Holland and South Africa!

With her use of graphs, photographs, drone footage and video, Mhairi treated us to a richly illustrated and fascinating presentation about the conservation and re-wilding of the three reserves about which she is clearly so passionate!

She was thanked warmly by Chair Richard Poyer.

Report by Liz Harrison

Field Trip Report

Musselburgh - 25th October 2023
Leader: Neil Hinchliffe
Report by Liz Harrison

Despite a pretty miserable forecast and a wet start, five members turned up to join Neil Hinchliff, our leader for the day.
Having met at Goose Green and first scanned the Esk estuary we headed South East along the estuary wall into driving rain, occasionally dodging the waves breaking over the wall!

Turnstone, Wigeon, Dunlin and Red Breasted Merganser were among the first sightings. Bobbing in and out among the waves were Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe, Razorbill and Shag. On the path and wall ahead were Stonechat, Wheatear and Meadow Pipit. Skylark sang over the grassland.

Next we headed towards a wooded area which gave some shelter and on to the lake, where we picked up Gadwall, Teal and Coot.

It was then on to the lagoons where we had lunch in the roofless hides! Here we added Grey Plover, Shoveler, Common Snipe and Jack Snipe.

With the weather improving, we headed towards a woodland area where Long Tailed Tits, Goldcrest, Fieldfare, Redwing and Grey Heron were added to our list.
Back at the estuary wall we began heading back, picking up Common and Velvet Scoter and Twite on the way.

A quick visit to the new lagoon gave us Curlew and Ringed Plover, before it was back to the coastal path again.
Guillemot, Red Throated Diver, Long Tailed Duck and a solitary Mediterranean Gull completed our final total of 68.

A great day out and thanks to our leader Neil.

Field Trip Report

The field trip produced an impressive list of 68 species:

1. Blackbird
2. Robin
3. Mallard
4. Mute Swan
5. Redshank
6. Carrion Crow
7. Red Breasted Merganser
8. Cormorant
9. Gt. Black Backed Gull
10. Black Headed Gull
11. Oyster Catcher
12. Dunlin
13. Starling
14. Magpie
15. Wigeon
16. Bar Tailed Godwit
17. Eider
18. Lesser Black Backed Gull
19. Turnstone
20. Herring Gull
21. Meadow Pipet
22. Great Crested Grebe
23. Goldeneye
24. Wheatear
25. Canada Goose
26. Shag
27. Stonechat
28. Gannet
29. Skylark
30. Reed Bunting
31. Gadwall
32. Coot
33. Woodpigeon
34. Song Thrush
35. Lapwing
36. Teal
37. Grey Plover
38. Shelduck
39. Shoveler
40. Common Snipe
41. Jack Snipe
42. Bullfinch
43. Blue Tit
44. Long Tailed Tit
45. Great Tit
46. Goldcrest
47. Chaffinch
48. Fieldfare
49. Grey Heron
50. Redwing
51. Common Scoter
52. Velvet Scoter
53. Golden Plover
54. Kestrel
55. Common Gull
56. Twite
57. Curlew
58. Ringed Plover
59. Pied Wagtail
60. Red Throated Diver
61. Guillemot
62. Razorbill
63. Long Tailed Duck
64. Mediterranean Gull
65. Wren
66. Jackdaw
67. Greenfinch
68. Goldfinch

Report by Liz Harrison
Photos by Liz Harrison and Fiona Southern

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for October...

Red-breasted Goose	1 at Harpers Heugh on 14th	PCA
Pintail	2 at Branton on 27th	JMcC
Common Scoter	34 at Alnmouth Bay on 9th	RP
	20 at Howick on 31st	JMcC
Little Grebe	2 at Ford Bridge on 23rd	JJ
Great Crested Grebe	4 at Alnmouth Bay on 1st and 9th	RP
	2 at Branton on 11th	JMcC
Grey Plover	41 at Birling Carrs on 1st	RP
	2 at Boulmer on 16th	JMcC
Knot	49 at Birling Carrs on 1st	RP
	11 at Coquet Estuary on 11th	RP
	31 at Coquet Estuary on 31st	RP
	51 at Coquet Estuary on 26th	RP
Purple Sandpiper	1 at Seahouses harbour on 11th	PCA
	1 at Birling Carrs on 1st	RP
	2 at Boulmer on 16th	JMcC
Woodcock	1 at Holy Island on 17th	NH
Caspian Gull	2 at Budle Bay on 5th	JMcC
Sandwich Tern	1 at Alnmouth Bay on 9th	RP
Red-throated Diver	3 at Seahouses on 27th	PCA
	22 at Alnmouth Bay on 1st	RP
	31 at Alnmouth Bay on 9th	RP
Great Northern Diver	1 at Long Nanny on 26th	PCA
Sparrowhawk	1 at Long Nanny on 27th	PCA
Hen Harrier	1 at Snook, Holy Island on 30th	PN&MN
Red Kite	1 at Ratheugh on 11th	P&AH
Short-eared Owl	1 at Half Moon Slack, Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN
	1 at Holy Island on 17th	NH
Kingfisher	1 at Long Nanny on 12th	PCA
Great Grey Shrike	1 at Holy Island on 21st	NH
Hooded Crow	1 at Boulmer on 16th	JMcC
Yellow-browed Warbler	2 at Straight Lonnen Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN
	1 at Holy Island on 8th	NH
Pallas's Warbler	1 at Half Moon Slack, Holy Island on 29th	PN&MN
Dusky Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 30th	PN&MN
Arctic Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 10th	NH
Blackcap	1 at Snook, Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN
	2 at Holy Island on 30th	PN&MN
	1 at Howick on 9th	HRS
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Newton Stead on 12th	PCA
	1 at Holy Island on 17th	NH
Firecrest	1 at Half Moon Slack, Holy Island on 22nd	PN&MN
	1 at Howick on 23rd	HRS

Bird Sighting Records

Goldcrest	5+ at Seahouses old rail track on 27th	PCA
	12 at Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN
	1 at Branton on 11th	JMcC
	4 at Branton on 27th	JMcC
	3 at Branton on 29th	JMcC
	3 at Howick on 31st	JMcC
Redwing	c250 at Etal Manor Gardens on 7th	JJ
	c250 at Hepburn Woods on 8th	P&AH
Ring Ouzel	2 at Straight Lonnen, Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN
Black Redstart	1 at Snook, Holy Island on 29th	PN&MN
	1 at Holy Island on 21st	NH
Wheatear	3 at Long Nanny on 12th	PCA
	1 at Long Nanny on 4th	PCA
Brambling	4 at Strawberry Fields, Holy Island on 22nd	PN&MN
	1 at Howick on 23rd	HRS
Bullfinch	1 at Branton on 29th	JMcC
Twite	c34 at Long Nanny on 28th	PCA
Common Redpoll	1 at Holy Island on 30th	PN&MN
Lesser Redpoll	1 at Branton on 15th	JMcC
Siskin	1 at Holy Island Village on 8th	PN&MN
	2 at Holy Island on 30th	PN&MN
	1 at Branton on 29th	JMcC
Little Bunting	1 at The Snook, Holy Island on 8th	PN&MN

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
Howick Ringing Station (HRS)
James Joicey (JJ)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Phil & Marge Noble (PN&MN)
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

A non birding holiday in Iceland by Liz Harrison

Earlier this year we made our second visit to Iceland. This time we decided to spend more time in the North, having spent time exploring the South on our previous visit in July 2016.
We wanted to learn more about the 'Land of Ice and Fire' and its Geology, Geomorphology and Flora and if I bumped into a few passing birds by chance, so be it, my husband not being a birder!
Arrival at our first hotel overlooking Lake Myvatn, we were greeted by Snipe drumming and chipping accompanied by the constant warbling of Whimbrel. A Black Tailed Godwit resplendent in full breeding plumage ambled along the roadside before heading back to the lake. Redwing were foraging in the scrub outside our window! We heard them singing on each walk we did in that area—something new for me, having previously only heard their thin piping calls as they visit the UK on their Autumn migration.

An 'off road' Super Jeep trip into the rugged highlands provided another treat: a pair of Harlequin Duck which I had hoped to see but thought unlikely given our itinerary! Shortly after, a Golden Plover in breeding plumage flew in front of our jeep. The Icelanders call it the Loa and rejoice in its arrival each Spring as it heralds the end of Winter and beginning of Spring. It is believed to foretell the weather, so they are closely watched by farmers.

A few days later we drove around the Snaefellnes Peninsula on a pretty miserable day. Entering one village we noticed signs with graphics of flying birds and a warning in Icelandic 'Beware Birds on the Road'. On the wet road ahead of us were hundreds of Arctic Terns although what the attraction was on a fairly busy road, I have no idea!

Avoiding the Terns we noticed a small pond ahead - what we would call a lochan in Scotland - with a small pull-in and rudimentary hide.

The different varieties of flowers were a surprise: mainly Alpines including Mountain Avens (Dryas Octopetela), Moss Campion, River Beauty Willowherb, Crowberry, Bilberry and Cloudberry. Lupins are a common sight, having been introduced many years ago!

Deciding it was worth a stop we pulled in; half a dozen Red Necked Phalarope were just off shore in the pouring rain! I dashed back for my camera and even my husband risked a soaking!

The rest of that day's expedition gave us more Common Snipe, White Wagtail, Whimbrel, Arctic Skua, Great Skua, Meadow Pipit and Golden Plover.
Next was a trip along the South Coast to Reynisfjara black sand beach near Vik, which is said to be the deadliest beach in Iceland, with weird volcanic rock formations just offshore. It has been the location for a number of films as well as some 'Scandi Noir' mysteries.

A walk to a nearby cliff top Nature Reserve gave us nesting Kittiwake and Guillemot and an excited throng of people with large lenses. What were they so excited about? A Puffin!

Our last night in the South was at a lovely hotel where we had stayed before. During dinner we watched a Whimbrel and its three chicks wandering unconcernedly in the grass just outside the window.

At dinner I noticed an American fellow guest with his book on Iceland's Birds holding forth to his family. We later bumped into them on an evening's river stroll as they puzzled over the stripy bird with the long beak seated on a rise. I explained it was a Common Snipe. The book was consulted before the party agreed that it was indeed a Snipe!

A little later the American was showing the Whimbrel to his group, explaining it was a Curlew which they pointed out to my husband, who explained it was actually a Whimbrel!

Curlew are rare winter visitors to Iceland whereas the Whimbrel migrate in the Spring to Iceland from West Africa.

Members' Contributions

As we continued our riverside meander we came across a group of Harlequin duck and further upstream, a Whooper Swan and its cygnets. It was lovely to see the swans - winter visitors to the UK - in their breeding grounds and amazingly in exactly the same location as where we saw them on our last visit in 2016!

On our penultimate day we had another 'Super Jeep' trip to Thorsmork, a stunning area of natural birch woodland, flowers (most of which were familiar), retreating glaciers, lava fields, caves and some rather white-knuckle river crossings!

Despite it being our wettest day in Iceland we did manage a few walks where we saw more Redwing and Golden Plover, though most birds were wisely hunkering down.

So ended our final 'no birding' holiday in Iceland. Our final total was 41 species!

It is difficult to holiday in Iceland and be unaware of the birdlife as they are so visible and need very little effort! Thus our individual interests were satisfied with no 'hanging around in hides'!

My one disappointment was not catching even a passing glimpse of a Gyrfalcon -maybe next time?

Species seen: Whimbrel, Common Snipe, Redshank, Harlequin Duck, Black Tailed Godwit, White Wagtail, Great Northern Diver, Redwing, Red Necked Phalarope, Arctic Tern, Arctic Skua, Fulmar, Great Black Backed Gull, Lesser Redpoll, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Pink Footed Goose, Whooper Swan, Common Eider, Tufted Duck, Black Headed Gull, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Slavonian Grebe, Golden Plover, Wheatear, Meadow Pipit, Mallard, Dunlin, Raven, Barn Swallow, Kittiwake, Herring Gull, Common Gull, Razorbill, Guillemot, Red Throated Diver- and one Puffin!

Members' Contributions

Friends of Red Kites news by Rosemary Bell

Rosemary and Graham Bell are members of FoRK (Friends of Red Kites), and following that organisation's Autumn Newsletter, Rosemary thought a brief summary would be of interest to members.

Since sightings of Red Kites are sometimes reported in our Newsletter's Bird Records, it is interesting to read in the FoRK (Friends of Red Kites) Autumn Newsletter of the current situation with these magnificent birds.

Monitoring has confirmed 27 breeding pairs, with most being in the wider Gateshead area and in County Durham. At least 39 chicks are known to have fledged.

In the west of Northumberland, south of Haltwhistle, five nests have produced eight fledged juveniles. FoRK is engaging with an estate on the Northumberland - Durham border where "conservation is an important objective" and they have no concerns over the presence of Kites, which pose no threat to grouse.

2024 will see the twentieth anniversary of the Red Kite release in Gateshead. We still hope their spread will increase to this area.

Image by John from Pixabay

You can find out more about **FoRK** and view their Autumn Newsletter from their website:
www.friendsofredkites.org.uk

A Ringer's Year - October 2023

After relating our activities of ringing three families of Mute Swans last month you would think there would not be much to say about them this time. However, the value of using the large colourful darvic rings (white letters on a red background) on swans has certainly been proven by the way it has been possible to track the movements of the Howick swans. On or around the 12th October the two adult swans (Female ZKA; Male ZJP) together with one of this year's cygnets (ZKB) turned up on the River Don, in Jarrow. This seems like an unusually long first flight for the cygnet. Then on the 13th the cygnet ZKB crash-landed in a car park in North Shields. Young swans often mistake wet car parks for 'pools of water' but ZKB was happily rescued by Blyth Wildlife Rescue and released fairly quickly onto Killingworth Lake. Then another report came in on the 16th of the same cygnet crash landing outside Longbenton Cat & Dog Shelter! Again, Blyth Wildlife Rescue took charge and it was returned to Killingworth Lake. So far, no further news.

Meanwhile the two other cygnets were still living on Howick Pool but by the 14th, ZKF had departed but ZKC had decided to stay. Since then, cygnet ZKC seems to have been exploring the local area: it was seen flying around the pond at least once but otherwise it's been spotted walking down the 'Long Walk' towards the sea and then on the road from Howick to Seahouses Farm. On this second occasion it was returned to the pool for its own safety! Swans may appear to be intimidating but they can usually be persuaded back to somewhere sensible rather than letting them play in the traffic. We have fed ZKC several times recently with 'proprietary duck food' but they will also eat grain and bread.

We really would like your help in tracking any darvic ringed bird. Please, if you see a bird with a plastic ring on just make a note of the letters or numbers and their colours and tell me where you saw it.

It's this time of year when we start working on new bird boxes and other conservation initiatives like building 'Owl Sheds'. This is an initiative in the Coast Care (Northumberland Coast AONB) area to replace just a few of the small barns and hemmels that have been turned into holiday homes (or just been allowed to fall down), so depriving Barn Owls of nesting places.

Early in the month, volunteers constructed one of these small buildings near Fenham and as I write work is currently underway near Warkworth on another. It would have already been finished if not for the intervention of Storm Babet. It's hoped that Barn Owls will find these sheds as good places to roost and then go on to using them to nest in (see picture).

Ringer's Roundup

Still dodging the unsettled weather (and getting even worse weather forecasts) we have continued to ring at Howick Arboretum. On the 12th October we ringed 50 birds (41 new and 9 retraps). This of course is the time of year when we expect to see regular autumn migration and also the more random movements caused by birds encountering stormy weather on their regular migration routes. We also encounter birds like Goldcrests, a nesting resident at Howick arboretum but whose numbers can be swelled by hundreds arriving from Scandinavia.

The first bird we captured on the 12th was a Goldcrest and the one indication we got that this was a migrant was the presence of a lot of fat (looking like a small pack of butter obscuring the bird's trachea).

We also captured a Blackcap, which is probably on its way south, and the first Redwing (technically a thrush) recently arrived in of the North Sea (see picture).

Ringing again on the 17th, we captured 41 birds (28 new and 13 retraps). The retraps included a resident Dunnock first ringed as a juvenile in 2020. There were also a lot of Coal Tits, again a resident that actually survives better in bad weather than its cousin the Blue Tit. This is because it caches food: storing food like Beech Mast and Sunflower seed in crevices (in trees and fences) which it can then find again when it's short of food. We again captured a single Redwing.

Things finally got much more interesting on the 23rd October when we captured 56 birds (45 new and 11 retraps). The retraps included an adult Goldcrest (capturing an adult is unusual in itself) which we first ringed almost twelve months ago; it seems likely this is a returning migrant but it's impossible to prove this. It then became evident that there were a great many Blackbirds and Redwings around and we did capture some of these. Many of the Redwings seemed rather 'thin' carrying very little fat and having poor pectoral muscle scores (as their breast bones were more prominent than is usual). This suggests they have just arrived and have had a difficult crossing of the North Sea, but landing in Howick is a good thing for them as there are lots of juicy berries for them to feed-up on. We captured 11 Blackbirds, four of which had extra long wings indicating these were probably migrants rather than

local birds. Next, we ringed a female Brambling (the Scandinavian cousin of the Chaffinch) and of course lots of our resident tits and some Robins. There was also a rather beautiful female Blackcap carrying lots of fat and clearly a late migrant heading south (see picture).

Towards lunchtime something very special turned up: this was a beautiful male Firecrest, which in the New Forest you might think was a resident but at Howick it's the rare continental cousin of the Goldcrest.

Turning up at Howick is not part of a regular migration, which would be from central continental Europe towards the Mediterranean this time of year. It's probable that this bird was trying to leave the winter cold of somewhere like Poland and was pulled north by strong winds in some of this mad weather we have been having, and found itself at Howick.

What was especially interesting was how alert and healthy this bird appeared to be. Compared with a superficially similar sized male Goldcrest (caught at the same time) the Firecrest weighed 6.1 grams (carrying lots of fat) while the Goldcrest was only 5.3 grams. Bird books will of course tell you that these two species are 'both' the smallest found in Britain (see pictures).

After having to cancel two more ringing sessions, we did manage to get our nets up at Howick on Monday 30th and captured 63 birds (38 new and 25 retraps) on a very damp morning (it somehow did not actually rain). These included Goldcrests, some continental looking Blackbirds and lots of local tits.

However, the most excitement was caused by the capture of a very 'cross' looking female Sparrowhawk (see picture). We mostly capture male Sparrowhawks in mist nets, and while I am always aware that these are smaller than females it was very noticeable (even before we started taking biometrics) how longer winged and heavier this female was at 270 grams (compared with the last male caught at Howick who weighed only 160 grams, back in July).

We are coming to the end of the ringing season at Howick and it remains to be seen if the weather will allow us to do any more sessions this year.

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

Epilogue

A question from Lesley and Robert:

"We like to feed birds. We have a baffle and very big diameter trays. Nevertheless, the birds spill seed and, recently, rats have been attracted into the garden. Can members advise on the best way to prevent rats being attracted to our garden?"

Please send answers to:

Lesley Angell at derry1953@gmail.com

Book 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).

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

Notable Rarities In October

According to EBird the following rare species were spotted in Northumberland in October:

Red Breasted Goose
Baird's Sandpiper
Red-footed Falcon
Caspian Gull
Taiga Bean-Goose
Roseate Tern
Arctic Warbler
Red-flanked Bluetail
Little Bunting
Radde's Warbler
Black Scoter
Cattle Egret
Pomarine Jaeger
Leach's Storm-Petrel
Long-tailed Jaeger
Chiffchaff (Siberian)
Iceland Gull
Pallas's Leaf Warbler
Dusky Warbler

How many did you manage to see?

Got a great photo of a Northumbrian Rarity?
Would love to show it here...

Volunteers Needed!

Winter Gull Survey

Sign up now for the January Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS)
www.bto.org/wings

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

Content for the Newsletter

Submissions for inclusion in the form of notes, articles, photographs etc are welcomed. These should be Emailed to the Newsletter Editor. Deadline for copy is the first Friday of the month, but earlier is preferred. The target date for distribution is the weekend before the club's meeting, usually on the Sunday.