December Newsletter

Last month's Speaker Dr Colin Bradshaw.

Golden Oriole —Dr Colin Bradshaw

In this issue...

Club Information
Things you need (or might like) to know about North Northumberland Bird Club
page 2

Noticeboard
Lots of news and other stuff that might be of interest to you
page 3

Speaker's Presentation
Two hours from Tyneside, with **Dr Colin Bradshaw**. See **Paul Ashcroft's** report
page 5

Field Trip Report
Members enjoyed a field trip to Holy Island, Lead and report by **Alan Goodall**
page 8

Bird Sighting Records
Sightings made by club members last month, compiled by our Recorder **Paul Armstrong**
page 11

Members' Contribution
Nesting Goldeneye in the Breamish Valley 2023 by **Phil Hanmer**
page 13

Members' Contribution
Birding Reflection by **Steve Newman**
page 14

Ringer's Roundup
Phil Hanmer's roundup of recent ringing outings, with information on what was found
page 15

Epilogue
..and finally
page 17

Club Information

Chairman
Richard Poyer
07936 909649

richardpoyer67@gmail.com

Secretary
Paul Ashdown
01665 576771

ashbauve.pm@gmail.com

Membership Secretary
Fiona Southern
01668 214481

jfs@robincottage.co.uk

Treasurer
Alan Yeomans

Programme Coordinator
Neil Hinchliff

neilskye8@gmail.com

Programme Coordinator
Liz Harrison

liz.a.harrison22@btinternet.com

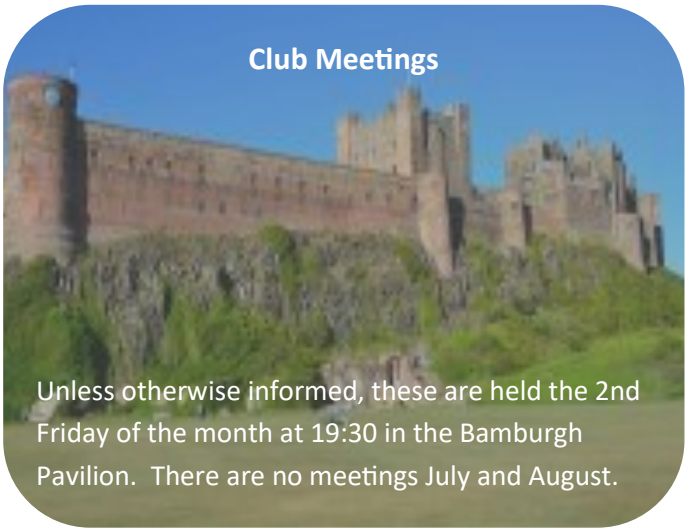
Committee Member
Alan Goodall

Honorary President
Graham Bell

Committee Member
John Lumby

Committee Member
Vacant Position

Committee Member
Vacant Position



Bird Recorder
Paul Armstrong
nnbcrecords@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor
John McCutcheon
john@waterstar.uk

Check out our Internet presence

On our web site at:
northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

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

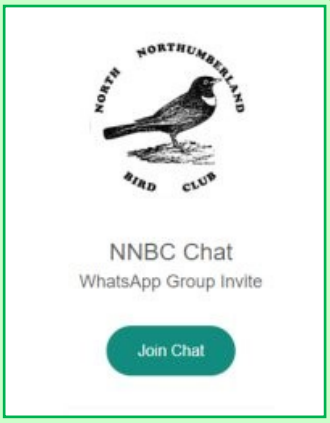
Email us at:
ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

Members WhatsApp Group Chat
NNBC Chat (Join by requesting a link)

"You cannot fly like an eagle with the wings of a wren." William Henry Hudson

Noticeboard

NNBC Chat—A New Service for Members



We are pleased to offer members a new WhatsApp Group Chat service. Here you can interact with other members and discuss Car Sharing, Favourite Birdwatching Locations, Recent Bird Sightings etc - in fact anything you want to discuss/ask others.

Committee member Neil Hinchliff (neilskye8@gmail.com) and Newsletter Editor John McCutcheon (john@waterstar.uk) are administrators.

If you haven't already had an email with a link inviting you to join, please request it from one of the Admins. When you get the email, follow the link to join the group. If you already use WhatsApp, it will display a window where you can click the "Join Chat" button. Otherwise it will take you to a web page, where you can click the same "Join Chat" button. If you do not already have WhatsApp on your phone you can first download it from the same web page, or get it beforehand from an App Store. It's available for both Android and iPhone.

As you join in and contribute, please remember to be civil and thoughtful with any content you share.

Upcoming Field Trips

December

There is no planned field trip in December. If anyone sees a rarity you could always mention it on NNBC Chat

Monday 1st January 2024

New Years Day Watching

Seahouses Area Leader: John Lumby

Meet as usual at the car park on the right as you enter High Newton by the Sea; need to start early at 8-15 am, so that we are clear of Bamburgh before it gets crowded!

Hope we have a good tally & that we can get into the Castle Inn as the light fails.

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 8th December at 19:30

Northumberland's Goshawks with Martin Davison (along with seasonal refreshments)

Friday 12th January at 19:30

Raptor migration through the Straits of Gibraltar with Iain Robson

See web site for details of other Meetings

At least five members of the NNBC took part in the Ringed Plover Project along the Northumberland coast this year. Bex Outram - LIFE WADER Wildlife Warden - has written a report and it can be found in the MagZine and News sections of the Website

Noticeboard

THE CLUB NEEDS YOU

There are still two spaces on the committee and we would like to encourage members to consider joining it to help organise and run the club. It is not really onerous, but it's essential to have new blood and ideas to ensure the club continues and thrives. Next year marks the 40th anniversary of the NNBC and it would be good to think that it still has many years to contribute to birding in the area.

Please ask any committee member if you are interested.

Birding in Catalonia

Following Dr Colin Bradshaw's excellent talk earlier this month, some members have expressed an interest in following in his footsteps. Colin's brother Jeremy runs trips to this area and can offer a similar itinerary.

To summarise, groups are for a maximum of seven in a mini bus. Larger numbers would require two vehicles. Accommodation is in small family run hotels with food and drink of a high standard.
Length of trip is normally seven days.

Approximate cost 1,500 Euros to include: transport, guiding, breakfast / evening meal in the hotel, packed lunch or in café. Not included: travel to/from Spain, Insurance, drinks other than bottled water, gratuities.

Itinerary: around Barcelona's coastal hills, Ebro Delta, the Lleida plains, lower reaches of the Pyrenees and then into the high Pyrenees. Best month to visit is May.

An incredible list of possible birds to be found including: Blue Rock Thrush, Dartford Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Little and Great Bustard, Shrikes, Collared Pratincole, Vultures, Eagles –and many, many more!
Contact Liz Harrison for more details liz.a.harrison22@btinternet.com
Alternatively you can contact Jeremy Bradshaw direct : birdingbradshaw@icloud.com

***NB:** NNBC is **not** planning to organise this as member's trip.*

Fancy using a telescope when birdwatching?

Glynis Gower, an ex-Club Secretary, very kindly donated a telescope to the club for members, and we have been thinking of the best way to make good use of this gift. Buying your own first "scope" can feel a bit daunting, as they are expensive and something you may not feel sure of using regularly. To help members check this out, you can borrow the club scope for a month or two, to try it out and assess how you would use it. It is also available if you are going on a special trip where one would be really useful. With only the one scope, it might not always be available immediately, but we will try to "share it around" and make sure as many members as possible benefit. If you would like to borrow the scope, please contact Alan Goodall for further information.

Speaker's Presentation

Two hours from Tyneside, with Dr Colin Bradshaw

November's talk was given to us by a long-standing friend of the club, Dr Colin Bradshaw. He explained that rather than taking us on a punishing long-haul flight to find birds in an exotic location, he was taking us to north-eastern Spain, an area still packed with amazing birds, but much easier for many of us to think of visiting. The talk was delivered with Colin's excellent blend of humour, insight and expert knowledge. He took us from the coastal wetland of Aiguamolls to the cliffs of Cap de Creus, and then up into the mountains and foothills of the Pyrenees, for a fascinating evening's entertainment.

Some of the birds Colin showed us would have been thought of as truly exotic in the UK only a few decades ago, but with climate change they are breeding further and further north – some of them like the Little Egret, even reaching Northumberland. Colin's tip for the next addition to our local list is the Cattle Egret, and we also have regular sightings of previously unheard of birds like the Glossy Ibis.

More of the birds Colin gave us from the mountains would be truly out of place in Northumberland. Alongside great images, Colin shared great stories of how he got them. We have to thank him for enduring a cow relieving herself over his cunningly camouflaged hide while he caught both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse.

Often, he uses water to attract shy seed-eaters, or sometimes sound to flush out skulking songsters. We enjoyed the fruits of his labours with shots of things like Spanish Sparrow, Rock Bunting and Sardinian Warbler.

All through the talk was peppered with real "masterclass moments" as Colin shared how to identify some of the trickier species. From separating the rarely glimpsed Spotted Crake from close relatives the Little Crake and Baillon's Crake, to the finer points of distinction between Chiffchaff, Iberian Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. (Personally, I have little hope of differentiating the shape of wing-tips on these, and so will continue to rely on song!)

Speaker's Presentation

Colin also gave us plenty of ecological context to birds he shared. The efforts of the Catalan government and local communities to protect biodiversity and encourage green tourism were clear.

We saw the fruits of a scheme to build bird-boxes for Rollers and Lesser Kestrels, and the spectacular impact of setting up feeding stations and hides for raptors. The photographs of vultures were perhaps the most spectacular shots of the evening.

We had not only the "standard" Griffon Vulture, but also Egyptian, Black and even Lammergeier. Awe inspiring!

The presence of these birds, relatively close to us in Europe, really makes you think – "only two hours from Tyneside…."

The other bird that I just can't leave out from the evening's show is the Little Bustard. Who will ever forget Colin's impersonation of this stunning bird, making its distinctive call and jumping up vertically from the long grass in full display mode. It is also one of my favourite bird names in French, the "outarde canepetiere."

Speaker's Presentation

We already have a Spanish holiday planned this spring, and have added one or two stops since the talk. If you were also inspired to plan a visit, Colin has given contact details for his brother who can help arrange things: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057127494950. For more details of the hides he talked about, contact Colin direct via email available from Committee members or see link in Noticeboard Pages

Report by Paul Ashcroft

Field Trip Report

Holy Island - 19th November 2023
Leader and Report: Alan Goodall

Ten club members met at the Snook car park for the Club Field Trip to Holy Island to share cars before proceeding to the main Chare Ends car park. While waiting for any new arrivals we had views of a Little Egret, Grey Heron and Oystercatcher. We then drove to the main car park and met up with a further six members. As we were getting ready to leave the car park, a large flock of Golden Plovers was seen high in the distance. The 16 of us (later to become 17 when we were joined by another member) set off towards the Straight Lonnen, first scanning the fields adjacent to the "Window on Wild Lindisfarne" as a perching Kestrel had been spotted among other things, but the surprise sighting for this time of year was three Swallows flying over the fields.

At the beginning of the Straight Lonnen a single Redwing, a Chiffchaff and a Goldcrest were seen along with the usual suspects - including several Blackbirds on the berries.

The recent rain has taken its toll on the Straight Lonnen and the conditions were probably better suited to Mallards and Teal rather than humans, though we did get views of lots of Curlew, Lapwings and a few Bar-tailed Godwits in the adjacent fields, as well as several views of the Kestrel that was seemingly following us for most of the morning.

While we were having a quick coffee break at the end of the Straight Lonnen, a pair of Stonechats and Reed Buntings appeared on the nearby wall. We then walked to Emmanuel Head for sea-watching and lunch. Among sightings were Red-throated Divers, Eiders, Guillemots, Razorbills, a Fulmar and Greater Black-backed Gull.

It was very pleasant eating lunch in the sunshine, especially for Chris and Maureen who had views of Bottle-nosed Dolphins.

We then continued to the hide at the Lough where we had Goldeneye, Gadwall, Shoveler, Little Grebe etc before heading towards the Crooked Lonnen, but first stopping to view the large flock of Golden Plover roosting on the rocks and then the amazing sight of them flying off in unison.

We then walked along Crooked Lonnen with further views of Curlew, Lapwings and Oystercatchers in the fields. All day we had been hoping for a sighting of a Short-eared Owl and then it happened. One was spotted distantly flying along the top of a hedge and then along a wall, then another was spotted in a different direction - and then this became two. Or could it be that there was yet another joining in the display and was yet another seen in the field behind us. After much discussion, the consensus was that at least four gave us a lovely display.

Field Trip Report

Time was now pressing, as it would be touch-and-go as to whether we would get back to the car park before our five-hour parking tickets expired. We just made it with a minute to spare. Some now returned to the Snook to collect the cars left there in the morning. Janet, David and John took a walk to the beach hoping to see the Snow Buntings that had been reported there the day before - they were delighted to find 24 of them performing for them.

Phil and Marge stopped at the Beal end of the Causeway as they were leaving the Island and were later joined there by David, where they were fortunate to see a Merlin perched on a bush and also Pale-bellied Brent Geese and Grey Plover, which were also new sightings. This brought our total number of species seen to 60.

I think all participants would agree that we had a great day on Holy Island with lovely weather, good company and great birds.

Species List:- Little Egret, Grey Heron, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Starling, Golden Plover, Kestrel, Blackbird, Collared Dove, House Sparrow, Robin, Teal, Redshank, Herring Gull, Pheasant, Lapwing, Swallow, Carrion Crow, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Redwing, Feral Pigeon, Chiffchaff, Snipe, Wren, Chaffinch, Pink-footed Geese, Song Thrush, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Reed Bunting, Red-throated Diver, Greater Black-backed Gull, Cormorant,Razorbill, Eider, Guillemot, Fulmar, Mallard, Goldeneye, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Shoveler, Gadwall, Little Grebe, Rock Pipit, Turnstone, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Magpie, Short-eared Owl, Black-headed Gull, Goldfinch, Blue Tit, Shelduck, Ringed Plover, Snow Bunting, Merlin, Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Grey Plover.

Photos courtesy of Richard Poyer, Mike Elder, Marge Noble and John McCutcheon

Report by Alan Goodall

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for November...

Barn Owl	1 at Allerdean Mine Farm on 22nd	P&AH
Blackcap	3 at Howick on 4th	HRS
Brambling	3 at Swarland Wood on 13th	JMcC
Common Guillemot	1 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
Common Redpoll	1 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
Dipper	1 at Hedgeley on 12th and 24th	JMcC
Fulmar	2 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
Goldcrest	1 at Branton on 24th	JMcC
	2 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	6 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
Great Crested Grebe	2 at Fenham-le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
Greenshank	12 at Fenham-le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
Grey Plover	1 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	40 at Fenham-le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
	18 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
Kingfisher	1 at Birling Carrs on 6th and 10th	RP
Knot	30 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
	32 at Birling Carrs on 6th	RP
	164 at Coquet Estuary on 29th	RP
Long-tailed Duck	1 at Newton Scrape on 3rd	PCA
	1 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
	3 at Holy Island on 26th	PN&MN
	3 at Beadnell Haven on 17th	DG&RB
Merlin	1 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	1 at Beal Point on 19th	PN&MN
	1 at Holy Island on 19th	DB
Mistle Thrush	1 at Branton on 24th	JMcC
Pochard	1 at Embleton Quarry on 5th	PCA
Purple Sandpiper	9 at Birling Carrs on 6th	RP
Razorbill	1 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
Red-necked Grebe	1 at Holy Island on 26th	PN&MN
Red-throated Diver	4 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	1 at Berwick pier on 22nd	PN&MN
	1 at Beadnell Haven on 17th	DG&RB
Short-eared Owl	4 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	2 at Fenham-le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
	2 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
	See at Holy Island on 19th	DB
Siskin	22 at Branton on 23rd	JMcC
Snow Bunting	24 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
	See at Holy Island on 19th	DB

Sparrowhawk	1 at Chathill on 26th and 30th	PCA
	1 at Yearle regularly through month	DG&RB
Swallow	1 at Holy Island on 19th	JMcC
Treecreeper	1 at Yearle on 22nd, 26th and 30th	DG&RB
Velvet Scoter	1 at Fenham-le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
Water Rail	1 at Branton on 7th and 17th	JMcC
Waxwing	10 at Berwick Station on 8th	PN&MN
	35 at Howick Pool on 27th	P&AH
Whooper Swan	2 at Newton Pool on 23rd	PCA

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB)
Dave Bradford (DB)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Howick Ringing Station (HRS)
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

Nesting Goldeneye in the Breamish Valley 2023 by Phil Hanmer

Fourteen breeding attempts occurred between April – 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. 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.

The first 'brood' of an incredible 18 ducklings was spotted out on the water at Branton on the 16/5/22. The only explanation for this large number is the merger of two broods into a creche under the supervision of a single female, with a few attendant males. The responsible females were most likely a bird first ringed in 2019 and another ringed in 2021. The fact that one female seems to have quickly left the scene is a confirmation of something suggested by the Geo-logger studies, ie that some females leave this nesting area very soon after their brood is out on the water.

Details are:
West of A697 up the valley
Nests 11; Broods 10; Young 92.
Roddam/Calder
All boxes were destroyed by Storm Arwen.
Hedgeley
Nests 3; Broods 1; Young 7.

Four brand new adults were ringed and eight retrapped. Of the retraps, two had been first ringed back in 2017 and so are probably 8 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.

The most intriguing find came in September when after some timber works were completed, we gained access to a box (that we had been unable to check since Storm Arwen). Here we found all the positive signs of recent occupation and a successful hatching. This is still the only regular colony of Goldeneye Ducks in England & Wales.

Phil Hanmer
Schedule One Holder for Goldeneye 24/9/23

Members' Contributions

Birding Reflection by Steve Newman (Travel Writer and Member)

The joy of being a travel writer is that I get paid to go all over the world and see some amazing places. The fact that I'm a keen birdwatcher means I also get to see some amazing birds as an added plus.

Dolphin Gull. Ushuaia, Argentina

Rookeries of tens of thousands of Adele Penguins on Paulet island, Antarctica, Wandering Albatross in the Southern Ocean, White Cheeked Starling in Japan, Bluefooted Booby in the Sea of Cortes and Fairy Terns in the Seychelles are just some of the highlights.

However I still get a great kick in constructing circular walks in Northumberland for Birdwatching magazine.

Some of these are now on the website on the *Birdwatching Places* page.

To me a Rock Pipit on Inner Farne is just as fascinating as a Painted Snipe in Mai Po Marshes, Kowloon or a Dolphin Gull in Tierra del Fuego.

Strange too, how often I see old friends. I remember looking at Pale Bellied Brent geese in Spitzbergen in July and thinking I'd be looking at these exact same birds five months later in Lindisfarne Bay.

Rock Pipit, Inner Farne, England

We often underestimate our own birds. I can remember a group of Americans in the Isles of Scilly going nuts over a male Blackbird. To them it was an astounding bird.

Recently I was walking down the drive in Belford when a flock of Long Tailed Tits put in an appearance. I wonder what the Americans would have thought of them?

Steve Newman
www.stevenewman.co.uk

A Ringer's Year - November 2023

Continuing the theme of last month, I can report on the Mute Swans of Howick and tell you that RW(ZLJ) has been spotted feeding in Budle Bay; this is a 2019 Cygnet ringed at Howick. Meanwhile ZKC, the sole remaining swan, a cygnet, still at Howick left on or around the 6th November. However, the 'resident' male '*Peter*' swan (XJP) arrived back on the Howick pool on the 12th. You can go and feed him with proprietary 'duck & goose food', barley or wheat grain, or a small amount of bread.

An interesting control by a fellow ringer near Amble reached me from the BTO; this was of a Barn Owl FH69456 a bird originally ringed near Warkworth back in 2014. So, at nine years old it's surviving well.

We did manage a final ringing session of the year at Howick on the 4th when we captured and processed 78 birds (52 new and 26 retraps). The morning was notable for catching 15 new Blackbirds, six of which had above average wing lengths - indicating they were almost certainly migrants coming to feed on the berry supply in the Arboretum. There was also Redwing and Mistle Thrush. Interestingly we also captured three 'late' Blackcaps, which may be *late* on their migration south to southern Europe/North Africa or possibly birds from the near continent coming here for the winter. As well as the usual resident tits there were also Chaffinches, Wren, Goldcrests, Robin, Nuthatch and Dunnock.

On the 8th & 9th November I met with a number of Coast Care Volunteers at Seahouses and guided them through making nine new Barn Owl boxes; these are to be erected in the Coast AONB area. So far these have been put up near Fenham, Budle Bay, Beadnell and Warkworth. Similarly, with the help of the Coquetdale Group of NWT we have been making some *Tawny-duck boxes:* three of us put six up in the Breamish Valley on the 20th. These may be used by Goldeneye ducks or Tawny Owls (hence the name). Three were replacements after normal wear & tear while another three were replacing boxes destroyed by Storm Arwen, which it had been impossible to replace any sooner.

Returning to ringing, my colleague Hilary set-up at her East Linden site on the 26th November and we captured and processed 100 birds (89 new and 11 retraps). The oldest was a retrap originally ringed at the same site in 2021. Most notable were our local rarities, which are always difficult to tell apart: three Willow Tits and two Marsh Tits; all juveniles of the year indicating that they are continuing to breed locally to the site (see photos above: Willow Tit on left)

There was also a male Greenfinch (see pic) unfortunately a bird that is becoming quite rare, Chaffinches, Goldfinches (see pic), Tree Sparrows, four Robins, a pair of Nuthatches, and other assorted tits.

Ringing myself, at home, with one of my C Ringers and a Trainee on the 17th we captured 52 birds (45 new and 7 retraps), including a surprising nine Robins. Four of the Robins were retrapped adults including one from 2021 while the other three were new (and quite possibly migrants). There were also a couple of House Sparrows (*a little rare around Lemmington Hall always outnumbered by the local Tree Sparrows*), Goldfinches, a single Goldcrest, Coal, Great and Blue Tits, Wren and Dunnock.

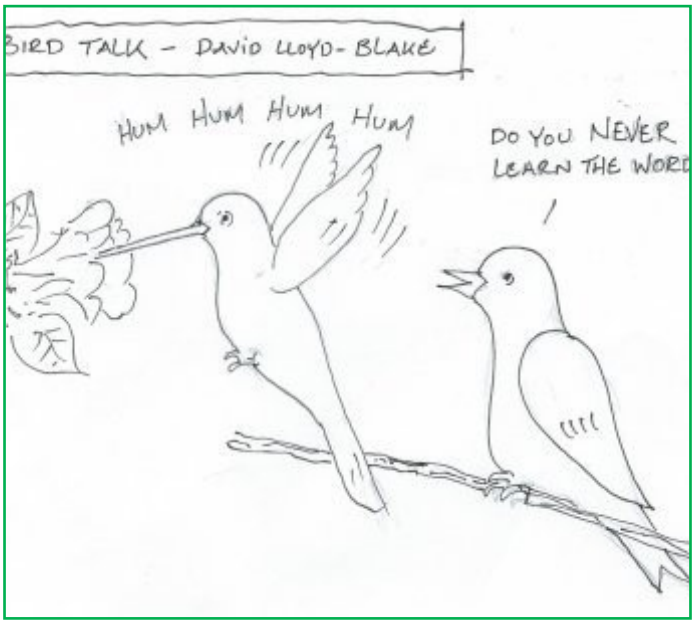
Meanwhile I have also been making some Swift boxes in support of the Longhorsley Swift Project that's being promoted by the Coquetdale Group of the NWT and supported by the Wingates Windfarm Fund, administered by Community Action Northumberland (CAN).

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

Volunteers Needed!
Winter Gull Survey

Sign up now for the January
Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS)

www.bto.orgwings



Festive Greetings to all our Members

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.