March Newsletter

Last month's Speaker David Steel

Off to work - David Steel

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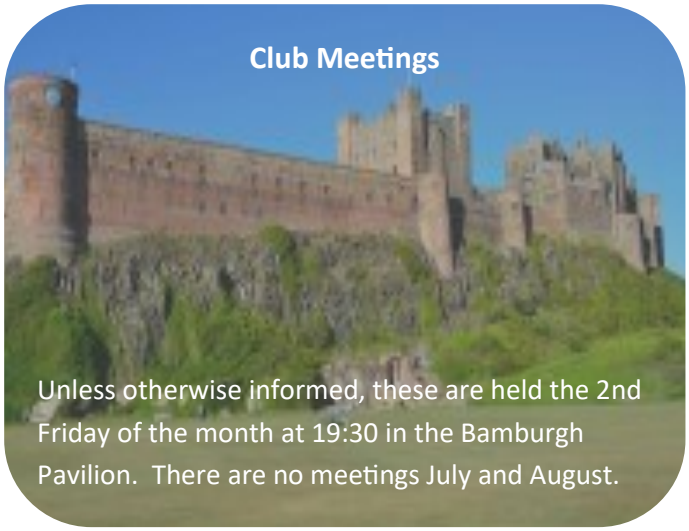

"Nothing in the world is quite as adorably lovely as a robin when he shows off – and they are nearly always doing it"
Frances Hodgson Burnett

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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

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

NNBC's 40th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday 18th May 2024, 12:30 to 15:30 at the Bamburgh Pavilion

A buffet lunch with ornithological entertainment of various kinds!

Costs: The event costs **£18** per person to include a finger buffet (provided by Carnaby's). Drinks will be provided. A non-refundable deposit of **£9** per person is needed to secure the booking. If you have already registered your interest ,please try to pay your deposit to Fiona Southern at the club meeting on 8th March. If you have not yet registered interest but now wish to join in the celebration, all you need do is provide your name and deposit to Fiona. The balance will need to be paid to Fiona by the following meeting on 12th April.

Photo Competition: There is going to be a photo competition on the day, with the winners decided by the attendees' votes. The TV in the Pavilion will show the photos and members will vote for their favourites. Please send digital photos (max size 2Mb) to Richard Poyer at richardpoyer67@gmail.com by 1st May.

The email should have the name of the species and the photographer taking the image. Please no more than five photos per member. Good Luck!

Upcoming Field Trips

23rd March 2024
The Hirsel (Coldstream)
Leader: **Neil Hinchliff**

See details on following page

April 2024
Branton Pond and Hedgeley Nature Reserve
Date and Details to follow

12th May 2024
Dawn Chorus at Ford and Etal
Leader: Lord Joicey

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, NNBC Chat, or directly with Leaders for the event.

See web site for details of other Field Trips

Upcoming Meetings

Friday 9th April at 19:30
Seven years with the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project with **Rick Taylor**

Friday 10th May at 19:30
The Little Tern Project at Long Nanny with **James Porteus**

Friday 14th June at 19:30
The wildlife of Outer Mongolia with **Brian Clasper**

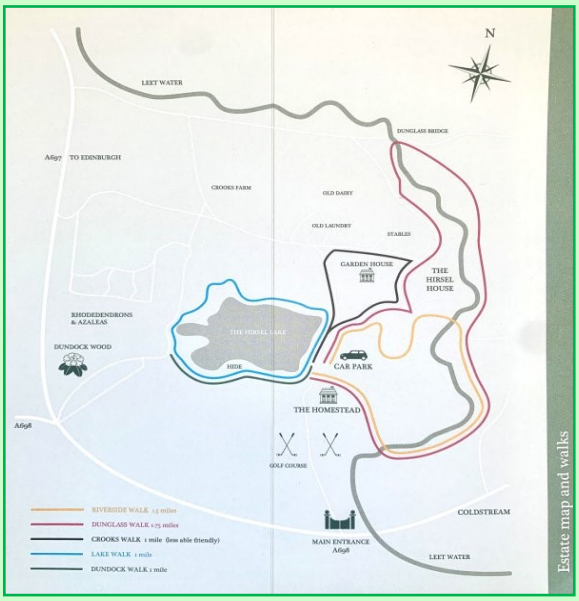
See web site for details of other Meetings

The Hirsel Field Trip on 23rd March

Our next planned field trip is to The Hirsel, beside Coldstream in the Scottish Borders.

All to meet at the central car park at 10:00. The trip will have two parts…the first being a 3 km venture through estate grounds, woodlands, and stream, which ought to bring in good numbers of finches, tits, and early migrants. Lunch can then be enjoyed at the café (with outside seating for those wishing to bring their own packed lunch).

Part 2 will involve walking around The Hirsel Lake, (2 km) including a visit to the hide, which ought to see many species, including Mandarin Duck and Kingfisher. If time allows, we can divert for 30 minutes through Dundock Woods (a further 1km).



Sturdy footwear recommended, though wellies are useful if it's wet underfoot. Loos are situated at the Café, and regularly available throughout the trip.

I'm always available should you have any questions. **Neil Hinchliff**

SHOREBIRD VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

Do you have a few hours free each week this Spring, which you could spend on the beach helping Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve protect breeding waders such as Little Terns and Ringed Plovers?

The Reserve is looking for volunteers to join their small but enthusiastic team as the Shorebird Breeding season is fast approaching and volunteers are needed: to help Shorebird Wardens and Staff, supervise important areas of the beach where waders will be nesting.

This will involve talking to visitors and explaining what we are doing, and to explain the importance of allowing the birds to breed without disturbance by people or dogs. There is evidence that supervision and protection of such areas results in less disturbance and a higher rate of success.

The Reserve also needs volunteers to undertake a coordinated fortnightly survey of Ringed Plovers on a designated patch of beach on the Reserve. Training will be given and there is excellent support from the Reserve Wardens.

If you are interested please chat to me (Liz Harrison 07778 552259) or contact Bex Outram, Reserve Manager at the Reserve Office on 01289 381470.

Speaker's Presentation

From Puffins to Penguins, with David Steel

Our February talk this year took place on a miserably wet winter's day, but a big crowd turned out for a familiar face. David Steel has spoken to the club several times before and is well known for his expertise on seabirds, especially puffins, built on his time on the Farnes and the Isle of May. This talk though, was based on his "off-season". While the Northumbrian puffins and terns are away, David took a flight reminiscent of an Arctic Tern, to visit Antarctica, and gave us a thoughtful and spectacular account of the wildlife he found there.

David obviously has pretty good sea-legs, because the birding began well before he got to Antarctica, as he showed us fantastic images of pelagic birds spotted from the deck of the boat as he crossed the wild seas of the Drake Passage. Some of these looked very similar to their northern cousins, birds like the Southern Fulmar.

Others - like the stunning variety of albatross - are unique specialities of the southern oceans. The images of these incredible birds showed the beauty and elegance of their facial markings and soaring flight, but set against the rolling seascape it was really difficult to grasp their awesome scale. The largest, the Wandering Albatross, has a breath-taking wingspan of over three metres, and is the largest of any bird. In a heartening aside, David explained that the work being undertaken to reduce albatross fatalities as a result of long-line fishing is having a positive impact. This was only his first reflection on the impact of humans on Antarctic wildlife.

Once the talk set foot on Antarctic proper, the penguins became the stars of the show. David shared great pictures of all the clan: from the crazy punk-feathers of Rockhoppers and Macaroni, through the cheeky faces of Chinstraps and Gentoos, to the elegance of King and Emperor Penguins.

Speaker's Presentation

Around the penguins, we also saw the predictable cast of predators and scavengers which help make penguin-life a challenge.

These range from the South Polar Skua, to the sinister Leopard Seal. Perhaps the most striking image of the evening was of two Southern Giant Petrels squaring up against each other over some carrion, both covered in blood from beak to feet. Not what you would call an attractive bird!

We also saw pictures of the shrimp-like krill which forms the basis of the ecological riches of the Antarctic seas, and heard of how rising sea temperatures were causing serious problems. David explained that he had seen a beach covered in krill fleeing the water which had become too warm for them.

Of course, birds are not the only wildlife amongst the ice. David also whisked us through some of the whales to be seen. Many of these populations are gradually recovering from the horrendous slaughter of industrial whaling. The images of rusting factories on South Georgia, now home to seals and penguins - a striking reminder of how we used to treat Antarctica. Human buildings in this wilderness look out of place to me, and David's stories of human exploration and tragedy seemed to reinforce this to me, suggesting we don't really belong here.

Nowadays, visitors to the far south do behave better. David explained that tourism is heavily regulated to reduce impact on wildlife, but it is still controversial and will only become more so as numbers increase. Even without tourism, climate change seems almost certain to put many of these stunning animals under acute pressure. Perhaps we are more likely to invest in saving them if we know more about them and appreciate their unique beauty? Getting the balance right is not, as David said, going to be easy…

Paul Ashdown

Field Trip Report

The Coquet Estuary on Saturday 10th February 2024

Twenty members met at the Warkworth beach car park on Saturday 10th February, most of them travelling from far flung northern parts of the club's region. We were aiming to bird watch on the estuary, the Bay and later at Birling Carrs. We were very fortunate to have a dry and settled day.

Walking down the Old Water towards the estuary a Sparrowhawk was spotted on a fence and it wasn't long before a pair of Stonechat flew up to perch on the shrubs alongside the Old Water. Pink-footed Geese flew high and then someone heard the song of a skylark and after much searching of the sky it was spotted. Also singing was a Song Thrush from the top of a distant tree.
Pipit identification was the subject of a long discussion between members, with the decision that there were both Rock and Meadow species.

The estuary at low tide had the variety of expected birds – Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Godwit. There was much debate about the identification of the Godwits, but agreement that both Black and Bar-tailed were present. We had good (close up) views of a large (80) group of Knot. There were Lapwing at the water's edge along with Cormorant, whilst the Shelduck sat on the mud. On the water were Eider and Little Grebe.

At the North Pier we looked onto a surging sea with big waves - very hard to see anything, but a good lunch spot. A Sanderling was dashing along the tide line.

A few people had to leave at this point but a small group pushed on, with quite a long walk along the English Coastal Path to Birling Carrs. On the way we disturbed two Red-legged Partridge. We had expected more of the Carrs to be exposed but the 5.2m tide and surge meant that much was already covered even two hours before high tide. However, there was a small group of Purple Sandpipers along with solitary Sanderling and Grey Plover.

Walking back along through the golf course it was good to see the trees with Reed Bunting, Linnets and Yellowhammers.

Arguably, the best moment was kept to the last stretch along the dirt road behind Birling, as suddenly a Barn Owl came from an area of buildings and gave us a great flying display for a few minutes.

A lovely end to the outing.

Thanks to Neil Hinchliff for his photographs.

Richard Poyer

In total 55 species seen

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for February...

Scaup	2 at Holy Island Lough on 19th	NH
Black-tailed Godwit	6 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	5 at Buston Links on 1st	RP
Knot	60 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	115 at Coquet Estuary on 4th	RP
Purple Sandpiper	7 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	c23 at Football Hole on 15th	PCA
	15 at Alnmouth Bay on 15th	RP
Common Guillemot	1 at conquest Estuary on 4th	RP
Red-throated Diver	1 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	1 at Birling Carrs on 19th	RP
Sparrowhawk	1 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	1 at Longframlington on 27th	JMcC
	1 at Swinhoe on 5th	PCA
Barn Owl	1 at Coquet Estuary on 10th	JMcC
	1 at Low Newton Tin Church on 8th	PCA
Short-eared Owl	1 at Stag Rocks on 1st	PCA
Goldcrest	1 at Doxford on 3rd	PCA
Treecreeper	1 at Yearle all month	DG&RB
Brambling	6 at Longframlington on 21st	JMcC
Bullfinch	1 between Yearle and Wooler on 8th	DG&RB
	1 at Low Newton Tin Church on 15th	PCA
	1 at Stamford Cottages on 8th	PCA
Greenfinch	2 at Yearle throughout month	DG&RB
Siskin	3 at Longframlington on 21st	JMcC

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Richard Poyer (RP)

North Northumberland Bird Club's area is between the River Tweed in the north and the River Coquet in the south, east to the sea and west to the Northumberland county border.

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.

Cape Verde Islands by Steve Newman

The Cape Verde Islands are situated some 200 miles off the west coast of Senegal: thus you would expect them to have a large amount of West African species. However, this is not exactly true but they nevertheless do have a large list of species that are of interest to the British birder. There are 10 main islands and many smaller ones. Four endemic species are found here and numerous endemic sub species, plus a large range of breeding seabirds. Unfortunately, many of the endemics are rapidly nearing extinction, but there are a lot of visitors from other continents.

The islands themselves are relatively easy to get to and some of them are virtually untouched by tourism, your problem comes in getting to and fro between them. You can do this off your own back by catching the system of ferries but if you want to see target species such as White-Faced Storm Petrel and Raso Lark you will have to negotiate a lift with the local fishermen, which can be quite expensive.

If you enjoy flying in small planes and don't mind schedule changes this is another way of getting around. Flights between islands however can be delayed, cancelled or even brought forward. The Saltworks near the airport on Sal has an amazing number of waders including Black Winged Stilt and Little Stint.

You can travel with a specialist birding holiday group or take an island-hopping cruise with someone like Noble Caledonia, although with the latter you won't go to all the islands. I took this option and as the cruise had its own excellent birding expert, I found this to be a good way of visiting the islands and seeing new species although I missed out on Egyptian Vulture which breeds on many cliffs.

Some of the landings are by rubber zodiac on the beaches and some on jetties, but this is actually quite a good thing as we were visited once or twice by Red Billed Tropic birds coming to have a look at us as we skimmed across the waves. We also managed to get Cape Verde Shearwater, Brown Booby and Bulwer's Petrel from the bow as well as the most amazing dolphin displays. There is also a local race of Little Shearwater but we never saw one.

The islands vary enormously in their topography from misty mountains, lush valleys, volcanic deserts, to salt pans and huge areas of scrub. The relatively flat island of Maio has both of the latter in huge expanses and vast deserted beaches. A walk in the scrub here produced in five minutes three native species of lark Hoopoe, Bar Tailed and Black Bellied. Whilst further along the salt pans gave us Kentish Plover, Gull Billed Tern, White Winged Black Tern, Ringed Plover and Black Winged Stilt.

In complete contrast you could be forgiven at first sight that the capital Praia on the main island of Sao Taigo seems to be an unfinished building site. Yet once out in the countryside you can pick up the endemic Cape Verde Warbler and the harbour can give you Western Reef Egret and the cliffs to the east Cream Coloured Courser. In the old Colonial Capital part of the town, we found Grey Headed Kingfishers perched on walls and telegraph wires waiting for the odd lizard of beetle to appear and Spanish Sparrows hopped around the town square.

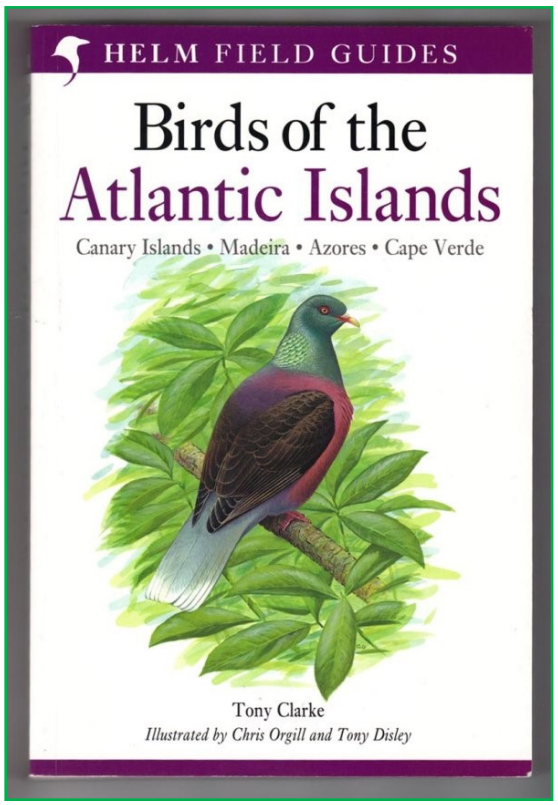
The islands actually have their own endemic Iago Sparrow with the females having a broad warbler like eyestripe and these are fairly common on most islands. The cliff tops of nearby Cidae Velha gave us Brown Headed Raven, Spectacled Warbler and Cape Verde Swift, whilst Little Egret stood nonchalantly in the irrigation canals.

Sao Taigo is also a good island to try and find the critically endangered sub species of Purple Heron and there is a sizeable population of helmeted Guinea Fowl. Cape Verde Buzzard and Peregrine have also been recorded, but the latter is now critically endangered and reports are few. Raptors in the islands are suffering and none more so that the Cape Verde Kite which is now thought to be down to no more than two or three individuals.

Our cruise did not stop at the island of Boavista, which was annoying as we could have passed by the offshore island of Curral Velho which has the last colony of Magnificent Frigate Birds in the Western palearctic (apparently you can scan for them from the beach on Boa Vista) and the nearby island of Passaros where White Faced Storm Petrel breeds.

Depending on the island ,many British birders hire cars or get taxis to drop them off somewhere and walk back. We tried this by walking away from the guided tour in Nova Sintra the capital of the small mist shrouded and plunging valley island of Brava and were instantly rewarded with a flock of Waxbills. Once you see them it's obvious how they got their name as their bills really do look like candle wax.

If there is one bird that you want on your tick list here then it has to be the Raso Lark. It lives on the uninhabited island of Raso just off the island of Sao Nicolau and has one of the most confined ranges of any bird on Earth. If you want to see it, you're going to have to hire a boat but you can pick up some good sea species on the crossing over. This can be quiet expensive.



The neighbouring island of Branco has Madeiran Strom Petrels and Sao Nicolau has a good road system for coastal viewing, with the small town of Barril just up from the ferry landing at Tarrafal having a cliff point where Fea's Petrel are often seen.

In a short article like this we can only scratch the surface of these islands' potential for the British birder. You need meticulous planning and I can't recommend enough the advice given by some of the outstanding British birders who have visited the island.

I took with me a copy of Birds of the Atlantic Islands by Tony Clarke bought from Amazon. It is very good and gives you locations for species. My edition didn't have any maps in it but I still found it very useful and can highly recommend it.

Steve Newman

A Ringer's Year - February 2024

First, my regular report on the Howick Swans is a bit thin this month as the last time the pair (Red coloured rings male ZJP and female A069) were seen on their pool was around about 30/1/24. So, if anyone spots them, I would be pleased to hear about this.

Staying at Howick, some readers will be familiar with the Wildlife Sound Recordist Geoff Sample. Now Geoff is very interested in the behavior and singing of these birds. So, to assist him in reliably identifying individual blackbirds we have agreed (*under license from the British Trust for Ornithology*) to colour ring the village blackbirds. Starting on the 7/2/24 (and twice more since) Hilary and I have so far been able to ring seven individual birds. A White ring above the metal BTO ring on the right leg simply indicates that these birds have been ringed in 2024 while a unique combination of colours on the left leg identifies specific birds. The first research worthy observation came in on 22/2/24 from Stewart Sexton who was able to photograph juvenile Male (Blue/Yellow) fighting with adult male (Red/Yellow); for the attentions of female (Black/Yellow).

Another adult male (White/Yellow) just watched from the sidelines (see photo)! There has also been a small by-catch of mostly Robins and Starlings. This gives me the justification of including a photo of a Starling just to show how beautiful this often-maligned bird truly is.

Ringer's Roundup

One of my C Ringers (Caroline) decided that she really needed a break from this cold and especially wet winter we have been having, and has been in The Gambia at the Kartong Bird Observatory supporting the 20 odd different research projects they are operating in collaboration with several Universities. She sent me two interesting pictures: one is of a Hooded Vulture, a bird which local people need to clean up carrion (see photo). The other is of a Eurasian Scops Owl which migrates north into Europe to breed in the Spring (although very rarely reaching the British Isles).

Meanwhile my two brand new C Ringers have been ringing and observing birds close to home and Allan (Selkirk) has had Redpoll, Reed Bunting (not a very frequent garden bird) and a Goldcrest.

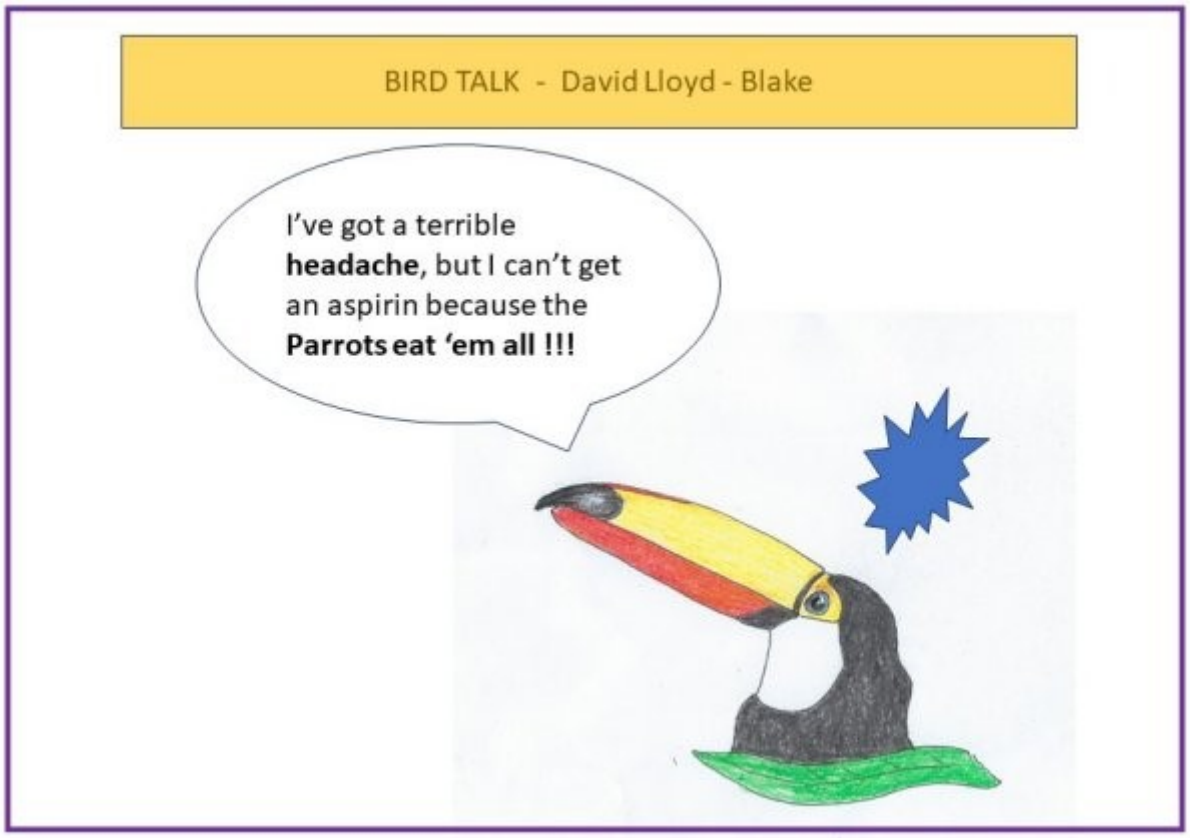
The Goldcrest was feeding on Fat Balls which seems to be only a recent behavior change for this species (see photo). Meanwhile Kevin (Rothbury) has recently ringed a Brambling, which is of course about to migrate back north to Scandinavia to breed.

Ringer's Roundup

Updating on the campaign to encourage folks to put up Swift Boxes. Just to show they don't just have to go on houses but they can also be put up on farms. The adjacent photo is from the Longhorsley Swift Project and shows boxes recently put up on the gable-end of a wooden barn (see photo.).

Finally, I thought I should mention the initiative with the National Trust and Coast Care to put 'Bearded Reedling Nest Wigwams' into the reedbeds at Low Newton. We tried to do this before Christmas but the water-levels were just too high - but eventually last week we succeeded and the photo shows both a Grit Tray (these birds need to get grit to digest their food) and a new wigwam in place.

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



Remember where we...

Word of Beak!

With several feeders in the garden, I reserve one which I fill with sunflower hearts for the local Goldfinch - and recently for some friends they brought around (Bramblings). Invariably the Sunflower Hearts are quickly consumed leaving that feeder empty, while others with general garden bird seed might still be half full. Once the sunflower heart feeder is empty, the Goldfinch don't visit. It may be several days before the feeder is filled again and no sooner than it is, as if by magic, the Goldfinch return. How do they know? Who tells them? It happens without fail! Do they have a lookout that sends a signal the feeder is full? Are they using WhatsApp? Quite a mystery (to me anyway) ….

Epilogue

Classic Bird Books for Sale

- Hodgson & Rossiter: The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Northumbria 1995. 1st edition, dust wrapper size 305 x 220 very fine condition (Barter Books £60/£70 when available) £30
- Snow & Perrins: The Birds of the Western Palearctic 2 volume boxed set. 1st Concise Edition 1998 size 270 x 220, dust wrappers very fine condition (online price £80/120) £50
- Clarke: Montagu's Harrier 1996. 1st edition, dust wrapper size 232 x 167 very fine condition £25
- Newton: Bird Migration 2010. 1st edition, card covers (New Naturalist) signed by author. In fine condition £25
- Gaston The Ancient Murrelet 1992. 1st edition, dust wrapper, very good £15.
- Marzluff & Balda The Pinyon Jay 1992. 1st edition, dust wrapper, good £8

Contact John Lumby Tel; 01665 720654
or at North Sunderland, Seahouses, Northumberland, NE68 7WG.
On sale a small donation will be made to club funds.

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. This 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.

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.