April Newsletter

Last month's Speaker **Rick Taylor**

Breamish - Tawny Owl **Phil Hanmer**

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Club Information

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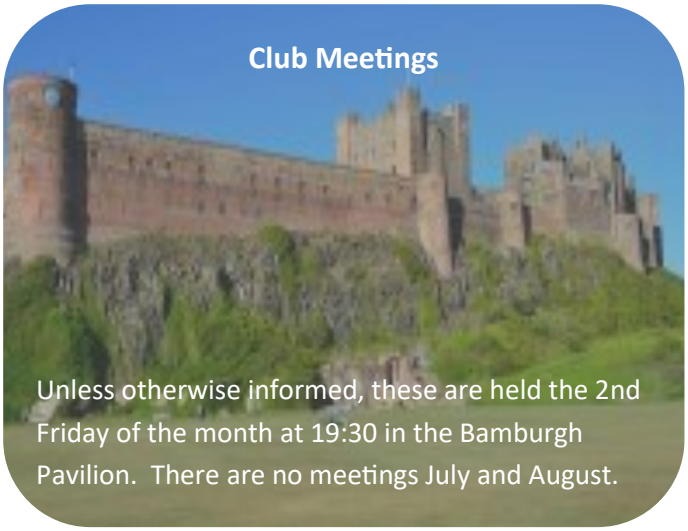

Club Meetings

Unless otherwise informed, these are held the 2nd Friday of the month at 19:30 in the Bamburgh Pavilion. There are no meetings July and August.

"It's reassuring to know that the garden birds are there, even when I'm not."
Joe Harkness

Bird Recorder
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Newsletter Editor
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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)

Noticeboard

NNBC's 40th Anniversary Celebration

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

We hope all attendees will have a wonderful time - look forward to seeing you there

A buffet lunch with ornithological entertainment of various kinds!

Upcoming Field Trips

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

See details on following page

9th June 2024
St Abbs Head
Leader: **Richard Poyer**

See details on following page

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 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

Noticeboard

Dawn Chorus Field Trip on May 12th

Our May field trip is the Annual Dawn Chorus trip to Ford and Etal estate, led by Lord James Joicey.

This will be around the newly planted woodland sites at Watchlaw, adjacent to Etal Moor (aka Slainsfield Moor).

Over 40,000 trees are being planted there, so the landscape will be changed. It would be excellent to get a good list of May-time birds there, whilst the trees are only just planted and the landscape remains as it is. Over time, things will change and it is important (and interesting) to keep a record of the changes.

The meeting point is at the **Cheviot Brewery Car Park** at **Slainsfield**, at **05.30 am**

Grid Ref NT 950 394, What3Words "guests.tropic.vent ", Lat/long 49.766809 , -7.5571598

Breakfast will follow!

St Abbs Head Field Trip on June 9th

Meet at the National Nature Reserve (National Trust for Scotland) Car Park (O.S. NT913674) about a mile north of Coldingham on the minor B6438 to St Abbs.

The plan is to walk to the headland for spectacular views of the seabird communities including Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills and perhaps a few Puffins. Other wildlife interest might include cetaceans, butterflies and a profusion of wildflowers. Wear stout shoes/ walking boots and bring a packed lunch if you wish. The cafe at the reserve centre should be open.

There is a £3 car parking charge for non-National Trust/NTS members, but access to the Reserve and Centre is free. The machine does not always work for National Trust members, but displaying your card will suffice.

Leader: Richard Poyer 07936 909649

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. 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.

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.

Speaker's Presentation

Seven Years with the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project with Rick Taylor

Rick Taylor, Community Outreach Officer for the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project was our first speaker on Zoom during the Pandemic in 2021!

Golden Eagles, historically present in England, Wales and Southern Scotland have been gradually driven North over the centuries. Persecution and food availability were among many factors leading to their disappearance, with the exception of a few isolated individuals in Southern Scotland -insufficient to mate and breed.

Concern was raised in 2008 due to the lack of the species in the South of Scotland, so following research by Scottish Raptor study groups it was concluded there was a probability that Golden Eagle could be reintroduced to the area. Whereas there were 300-400 pairs in Northern Scotland, there remained only 3 pairs in the South of the country which were unable to flourish.

With support from a number of conservation groups including the Southern Upland Partnership, Nature Scot, Scottish Forestry and the RSPB the decision was made to attempt translocation to the South.

Prey availability, suitable habitat - but not necessarily mountainous terrain - and weather were all taken into consideration when deciding upon a suitable area for relocation. Networking with local people, landowners, gamekeepers and schools ensured any concerns were fully addressed.

One major concern was the possible threat to lambs and pets, but observation shows that healthy lambs are not at risk - nor are pets as the Eagles are easily discouraged by sheep and humans. An analysis of their prey over a period of four years showed a wide range of prey including fox, badger cubs, Gulls, Ravens, Hares, Grey Squirrels, Meadow Pipits, carrion and even spawning frogs!

Finally, suitable habitat having been found, the Project was given the go ahead to relocate 5-10 chicks into the area from the North over a period of five years. Golden Eagles do not reach breeding maturity until five years.

The decision regarding which nests were suitable and at what age the chicks could be moved for translocation relied on guidance from local gamekeepers. Chicks were not removed from the nest until 5-8 weeks or until they were able to independently strip a carcass. In an eyrie containing two chicks the stronger is always taken, as a bigger more demanding chick always is first in the queue for food, so the smaller chick doesn't get its fair share, fails to thrive and may be killed by its sibling. This practice will allow the smaller chick to be fed so the benefits are twofold.

Once relocated to the chosen area, the birds are put in large custom-built aviaries and fed by hand (disguised and protected from beaks and claws). Disguising the human hand obviates the risk of imprinting.

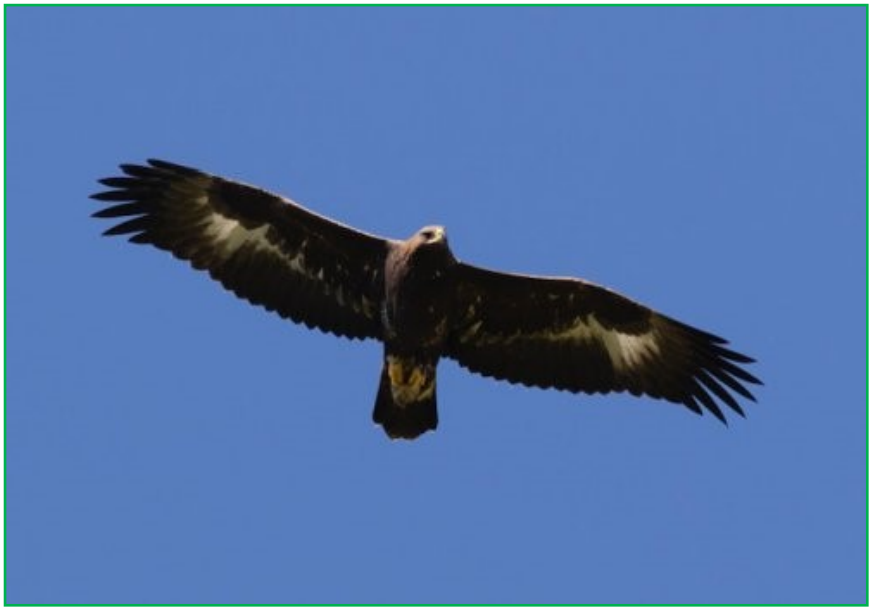
Speaker's Presentation

At around 14 weeks, the youngsters are fitted with lightweight backpack satellite tags. They are encouraged to leave the aviaries when they are ready. Some fly away immediately whereas others take their time.

2018 saw the first release of the young eagles. This continued annually up until 2023, with more birds being released with names chosen by local schools and celebrities. Sadly, a young bird from the 2022 release disappeared and foul play is suspected.

Having left the eyrie, they do not re-enter it but may perch on the roof. Food dumps of carrion are left in designated areas to give them a good start in life. Eagles do not need to be taught to hunt by a parent.

To date there are 46 adult Eagles, 28 juveniles, 6 new nests and 7 new territories!



Rick emphasised the importance of involving the local community to encourage a sense of pride in the project. Local school children and celebrities are invited to name each year's fledglings and trained volunteers record sightings. Courses are offered on raptor identification: captive Golden Eagles are taken into schools to allow children close observation so the next generation is well informed. There is also an annual festival in Moffat each Autumn which is popular, as wildlife celebrities are often invited to attend. This year's festival is 6th-8th September and early booking is essential!

With a sustainable population of Golden Eagles now thriving in the Scottish Borders, the Project is to be discontinued in November. It is hoped that as time goes on, we will see more of these majestic birds soaring regularly over Northumberland!

Rick's talk, delivered with warmth, humour and an obvious affection for his subject, was an optimistic view of a species which has divided opinions over the years. With all the work done with local people, schools, farmers, landowners and gamekeepers it is to be hoped that this respect and understanding of the Golden Eagle will ensure it thrives in the years to come.

Liz Harrison

16th April 2024

https://www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

Field Trip Report

Druridge Pools and Links on Sunday 21st April with Iain Robson

With a 9am morning start, 17 members met at Druridge Bay on a fairly calm but quite dull day. The bonus of being wind and rain free was welcomed by all. Our leader for the day: this is Iain Robson's home patch and it soon became clear how well he knew what he calls the best birding site in Northumberland. Iain's narrative throughout the day was exceptional, with insights into the area's history, ecology and abundant bird life.

Having been out since 7am, Iain had already counted 44 species. As we gathered together at our meeting point the calls of ChiffChaff, Wren, Willow Warbler and a nearby Grasshopper Warbler chattering away were our first species. Iain outlined the plan for the morning, with the first stop to be the Budge Screen. We made our way to the screen through the quite muddy entrance track, which a couple of weeks earlier had been rather submerged. En-route we added Stonechat, Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting. Best of all the usually shy Grasshopper Warbler obliged and presented on the top of a shrub for all to see.

The screen was quite tight for 17 people but everyone seemed to get a good view of the ponds. In discussion Iain explained how the name came from the days of opencast mining and was named after Richard Budge of RJB Mining. With two or three scopes out, a quick survey of the ponds provided the usual suspects. Greylag and Canada were obvious and were joined by an incoming flight of 8 Pink Footed. Moorhen, Coot, Mallard, Teal, Wigeon and Gadwall presented.

Several Heron were nesting and Iain gave an insight that since Storm Arwen the Heron had been nesting lower down than had been usual. There had been the first recording of Heron nesting on reeds and although they bred they did not survive, likely being predated by creatures unknown. Two Roe Deer made an entrance at the far side of the lake (a usual occurrence).

A distant Whooper Swan, a Sparrow Hawk flying in front of the screen, a Whimbrel on the far mud bank, a couple of Red Legged Partridge, an incoming Cormorant, 4 Pochard and 5 Sand Martins added to the tally. 45 Curlew flew in to join the Lapwing and the confirmed Whimbrel. Satisfied with our first port of call we moved on to the hide at the far side of the ponds.

On the way Iain pointed out a Long Tailed Tit nest and we discussed the number of birds that seemed to be opting to nest in fairly busy places. At first no sign of

the occupants but then a male flew in with food in his beak and stopped for a moment for all to see.

In the second hide (again rather tight for all of us!) still overlooking the Budge field, Pied Wagtails hopped around in front of us. A distant Curlew's leg showed a display of rings, not thought to be local. A couple of Magpies, Redshank and Little Grebe added to the list. No sign of the Yellow Wagtail that had been reported the day before. A good but far off view of a Heron on a low nest, just showed how their habit had changed.

Moving to the big pool, Tufted Duck, Oyster Catcher and Mute Swan were visible. This pond is generally not as productive as the others. Iain commented that it was up to 30 feet deep in places and was good for Otters that were spotted now and again – although not today. Our visit was brief and we headed back to the meeting point. At the end of the track our first Sedge Warbler of the season was calling and Iain said in another couple of weeks, many more Warblers would be resident.

After a quick snack break, we decided to top the dunes and test our fortunes out at sea. 15 Sanderlings scuttled across the sand, while Swallow, Herring Gull, Sandwich Tern, Fulmar, Kittiwake and Gannet were seen flying past, mostly a fair distance from shore. During our 30 minutes or so overlooking the sea, the sea eagle-eyed spotters identified Red Throated Diver, Razorbill, Common Scoter, Guillemot and Red Breasted Merganser. Looking back inland, a Buzzard and Goldfinch increased our total.

Easy on the foot leather, as we only walked about 500 metres, stopped in five viewpoints and had plenty of time to look, chat and take photos. This was a great field trip expertly led by Iain, who willingly shared his vast knowledge.

Field Trip Report

Species seen (62):

Greylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Common Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Common Eider, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Little Grebe, Feral Pigeon, Common Woodpigeon, Common Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Northern Lapwing, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Sanderling, Razorbill, Common Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Red-throated Diver, Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, Grey Heron, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Common Magpie, Carrion Crow, Eurasian Blue Tit, Sedge Warbler, Common Grasshopper Warbler, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian Wren, Common Starling, European Robin, European Stonechat, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Common Linnet, European Goldfinch, Common Reed Bunting

Earlier Iain saw (11 species):

Grey Partridge, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Lesser Black Backed Gull (Intermediate), Jackdaw, Rook, Skylark, Black Cap, Dunnock, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch

Later: Mick and Cathy saw (2 species):

Jack Snipe and Little Gull

Report by John McCutcheon

Photos courtesy of Iain Robson, Richard Poyer, John McCutcheon

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for April...

Whooper Swan	3 at Low Newton on 5th	PCA
Egyptian Goose	2 at Warkworth on 2nd	RP
Avocet	7 at Newton Scrape on 11th	PCA
Avocet	8 at Budle Bay on 7th	PCA
Avocet	7 at Coquet Estuary on 2nd	RP
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Powburn on 27th	PCA
Whimbrel	14 at Tughall links flash on 26th	PCA
Bar-tailed Godwit	6 at Coquet Estuary on 2nd	RP
Black-tailed Godwit	4 at Coquet Estuary on 2nd	RP
Black-tailed Godwit	49 at Warkworth on 2nd	RP
Knot	23 at Coquet Estuary on 2nd	RP
Sparrowhawk	1 at Fenwick Granary on 29th	PCA
Marsh Harrier	1 at Low Newton on 5th and 11th	PCA
Barn Owl	1 at Low Newton on 5th	PCA
Hooded Crow	1 at Milfield on 9th	JJ
Hooded Crow	1 at Bamburgh on 26th	PCA
Raven	2 at Harthope Valley on 15th	PCA
Willow Warbler	1 at Branton on 12th	JMcC
Grasshopper Warbler	2 at Bamburgh from 19th	PCA
Blackcap	1 at Chathill on 26th and 29th	PCA
Blackcap	2 at Spindlestone North on 26th	PCA
Nuthatch	1 at Doxford Road on 13th	PCA
Nuthatch	1 at Spindlestone North on 26th	PCA
Redwing	13 at Doxford on 6th	PCA
Ring Ouzel	5 at Langleeford on 22nd	DR
Ring Ouzel	1 at Harthope Valley on 15th	PCA
Wheatear	1 at Long Nanny on 30th	PCA
Brambling	3 at Longframlington on 15th	JMcC
Brambling	1 at Chathill on 5th	PCA
Bullfinch	1 at Newton Pool on 5th	PCA
Greenfinch	2 at Longframlington on 15th	JMcC
Siskin	2 at Chathill from 13th	PCA

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Dave Bradford (DB)
James Joicey (JJ)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Richard Poyer (RP)
David Richens (DR)

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.

Grey Wagtail - Howick - Phil Hanmer

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.

An Evening of Mini Presentations

It's a while now since the club dabbled in this, but I was hoping to put the invitation out for any club member to consider entertaining us with a mini presentation. Presently, at each indoor meeting the club invites a speaker, who then delivers around an hour (sometimes a little more) of a relevant topic. I was hoping there would be some budding presenters within our numbers who would love the opportunity to give a presentation during one of our indoor meetings. Perhaps you don't have sufficient information to fill a full evening, or perhaps you have never presented before and would just like to give it a wee whirl.

I was initially going to suggest 3 speakers for 20 minutes each, though this could easily become 4 at 15 minutes or some other combination. Please let me know your thoughts, and if you are one of those just begging to test the water, please get in contact either during one of our meetings, field trips or via email.

These would be taking place in 2025, as our programme for 2024 is already full.
I'm looking forward to being ***inundated***

Best regards
Neil Hinchliff neilskye8@gmail.com

ps I'm also due to take over completely from Liz Harrison as Programme Co-ordinator later in the year.

Members' Contributions

Members' Contributions to the Newsletter

Several members have submitted articles for publishing in the Newsletter. Offered on their own volition to add interest, inform and entertain the other members.. So far all have been very interesting and much appreciated. BUT we need more, so please consider an offering you think will interest, enlighten or simply amuse your fellow members.

The list of possible topics is immense but some ideas to stimulate your creative juices include:

- Why I just love Starlings (or some other species of course)
- My favourite bird watching location
- An encounter with a Pterodactyl (or some more likely species)
- My visit to Slimbridge (or some other nature reserve)
- An urge to twitch
- My garden encounters (with birds that is!)

In 99.9% of cases, they should of course relate to birding!

Look forward to receiving your offerings!

A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

Please ensure that any Swallows returning to breed have access to last years nesting site through a gap in the door or window. A small nesting ledge fixed inside also helps.

Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

A Ringer's Year - April 2024

Some media readers will no doubt have already heard of Tawny Owls nesting in February but it's actually April when North Northumberland Tawny Owls really get into breeding. We initially located 12 nesting Tawny Owls, 11 with eggs and one with three small young. We can describe at least four of these females as old friends, carrying rings we put on in previous years, and its very likely there are two more in this category but they have not cooperated in letting us check them yet! One nesting near Longhorsley is of particular note, carrying ring [GR03102] she is *at least* 15 years old. Another bird [GY34777] ringed only last year when she raised two young near Longframlington, was found to have three small young already hatched.

Monitoring to date has found that one newly nesting owl has given up, while another seems to have come off worse in an argument with a Grey Squirrel (*surprising as squirrels can be predated by Tawny Owls*). However, another three have hatched young and we have been able to ring two (out of three) from the first found. So far it does not look like it will be a particularly good year for nesting tawny owls; perhaps a sort of average year.

I think this may be due to the poor spring weather and not particularly correlated with any shortage of food, as we have come across the remains of prey items in several boxes and in one spectacular find there were six Voles and three mice stored in a box.

Regular readers of this article will recall that near Powburn the owl's nest alongside our still unusual Goldeneye duck colony. So far, we have found 10 nests with up to 14 eggs in several boxes. We have also retrapped several females from earlier years, including [FH79907] from 2022; [FH92090] from 2021 and 2023; [FH92085] from 2021 & 2022; and [FH79907] from 2022 .

We had also hoped to find evidence of Mandarin ducks extending their range into this part of Northumberland, and indeed my colleague Hilary captured one nesting in a box near Wingates.

We had all assumed that if a Mandarin decided to use this box it would be the same female that used it last year *(our single nesters in 2023*), but surprisingly it proved to be an entirely new bird!

On one of the rare calm weather mornings of recent weeks (18/4/24) I decided to set up a single net and open up three garden traps. I have been tracking the migration of Siskins travelling generally north into Scotland and also hoping that some would stop moving and nest locally (as they used to do several years ago), and indeed I did catch some Siskins with several showing female Brood Patches (*were they loose feathers so that they can better incubate eggs next to their skin?*). However, the first surprise of the day was a new Willow Warbler; obviously just arrived back from Africa after wintering in the Ivory Coast or Ghana. It was a particular surprise because while we had been hearing several of their close relatives, Chiffchaffs singing near home, we had not heard any Willow Warblers.

Next, I caught a male Blackcap, just back from North Africa; things then settled down to a slow trickle of Siskins for an hour before I caught sight of a minor disturbance down the garden. Rushing out I found that a male Sparrowhawk had killed a Robin but on trying to make his escape from the garden, with his prey, had flown into my mist net. Subsequently I confirmed that not only was it a relatively small male but also a *last year's* sparrowhawk. Before finishing the ringing session of little over two hours I did catch a female Blackcap and a Chiffchaff, plus two squabbling Robins (both I think male).

Meanwhile another colleague Allan, ringing at Selkirk, got news of an interesting movement of male Siskin [BJD0370] that he ringed on the 29/3/24. It was controlled by another ringer, north of Castle Douglas in Galloway, on the 9/4/24 nearly 100 km away.

Ringer's Roundup

Ringing with Hilary and Caroline at another regular site near Longhorsley, before it rained again on the 26th we caught 29 new birds and 5 retraps. These included returning migrants: Chiffchaff 9, Willow Warblers 1 and Blackcaps 3. There was also an assortment of local 'residents': Tree Sparrows, Dunnocks and Chaffinch.

Now quite scarce it was good to catch 5 Greenfinch and one each of our special little rarities, the Willow Tit and Marsh Tit. From the presence of well-developed Brood Patches, we could see that the species that had started to nest already were the Tree Sparrows and the Dunnocks.

Most small passerines - especially those that use nest boxes and natural cavities to make their nests in - start breeding in May, and we will be checking locations from approximately the 10th of the month.

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

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.

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.