# Summer 2024 Newsletter

Last month's Speaker **Brian Clasper**

Lammergeie - Brain Clasper

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# Club Information

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**Committee Member**
Alan Goodall

**Honorary President**
Graham Bell

**Committee Member**
John Lumby

**Committee Member (Co-opted)**
Kevin Lever

***"The sound of birds stops the noise in my mind "***

**Carly Simon**

**Bird Recorder**
Paul Armstrong

nnbcrecords@yahoo.com

**Newsletter Editor**
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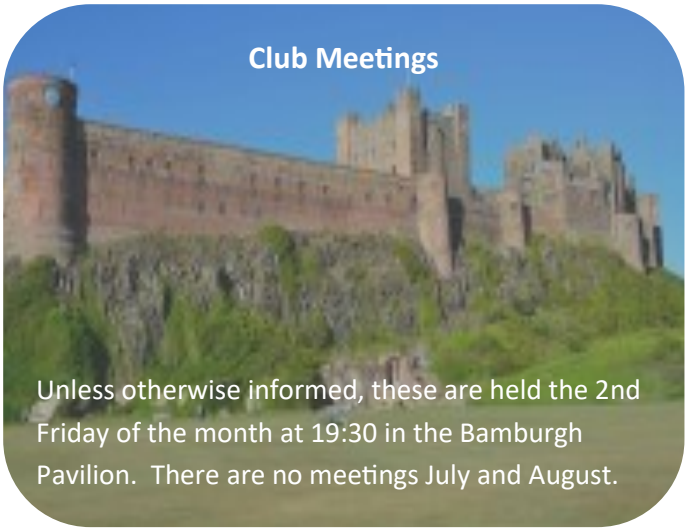
## Club Meetings



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.

## 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

***Welcome to our first Summer Newsletter***

While NNBC Chat keeps members involved, the lack of meetings and field trips during the summer break means a quiet time for many members. We hope this first summer newsletter is of interest and rekindles your enthusiasm (as if it was needed!) for the club.

**Bird Records**

While there are no club meetings in July and August, please do remember to send your bird records to Paul (our recorder) who will compile the monthly lists. These will be circulated to all as usual.

nnbcrecords@yahoo.com

**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.

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

Look forward to receiving your offerings!

**Membership and Subs**

Just a gentle reminder… Membership subscriptions become due 1st September. Membership forms will be sent out with the September Newsletter.

**Upcoming Field Trips**

**September 2024**
RSPB Saltholme - Details to follow
Leader: John Lumby

**Note:**
**There are no club field trips in July and August**

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 13th Sept at 19:30**
The Wildlife of Costa Rica with **Alan Yeomans**

**Friday 11th Oct at 19:30**
Update on Morpeth's Swifts with **Graham Sorrie**

**Friday 8th Nov at 19:30**
Return of the Red Kite with **Harold Dobson**

See web site for details of other Meetings

***The Graham Bell Trophy - preliminary details***

A photographic competition for members. The proposed rules are:

1. Open to members of NNBC
2. Digital photographs of a bird or birds taken in current year at any location
3. Species and location to be provided with entries
4. A maximum of three entries per person
5. Files of 2MB or less, saved in jpeg format
6. Maximum image dimensions are 1600 pixels horizontal by 1200 pixels vertical
7. Entries to be sent to NNBC Newsletter (nnbc@waterstar.co.uk) by 30th November

This year's competition will be judged by renowned local ornithologist Tom Cadwallender, with the result to be announced at the December club meeting.

Good Luck!

GO BIRDING

NORTHUMBERLAND

COCKLAWBURN

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

Sand dunes, farmland, rocky beach and mixed woodland

Purple Sandpiper

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: TD15 2RJ

GRID REF: NU 03138 48179

MAPS: OS Explorer 340, OS Landranger 75

PARKING: Free parking bay for 12 cars at the south end of the road. Plus two bays for eight cars each overlooking the sea. You can also park at certain places along the road

TERRAIN: Undulating, paths some with steep descents to the beach. Tarmac road plus a short steep climb to the old pill box to view the whole site

ACCESSIBILITY: Open all year round

FACILITIES: A café at Scremerston and a glamping site at Borewell. Shops, pubs and facilities are available in

If you're going to Cocklawburn, you will need a scope in order

Now on the web site: Steve Newman's bird watching site - Cocklawburn

# Speaker's Presentation

## The Wildlife of Outer Mongolia with Brian Clasper

For our final talk of the season, Brian took us to the heights of Mongolia, exploring the wildlife there. He explained how the trip came about not because of birds but rather his long-held wish to see snow leopards. Never the less he saw or heard 154 birds in the eleven-day trip. Taking place in mid-Autumn last year, he had the benefit of bird migration from areas north of Mongolia to regions such as the Indian sub-continent.

To cut to the heart of the trip first: yes, Brian did see, photograph and video snow leopards. Both adults and three entertaining cubs played around boulders in the Altai Mountains (over 3000m), Brian's videos being used by Nature Trek in the journal of the trip. Wolves, Pallas's Cat and Saiga Antelope were just a few of the other mammals seen.

Arriving in Ulaanbaatar after a stop in Istanbul, where Brian saw a group of Red-backed Shrikes, the first bird seen was a Black Kite – the first of many hundreds of Black Kites to be seen on the trip.

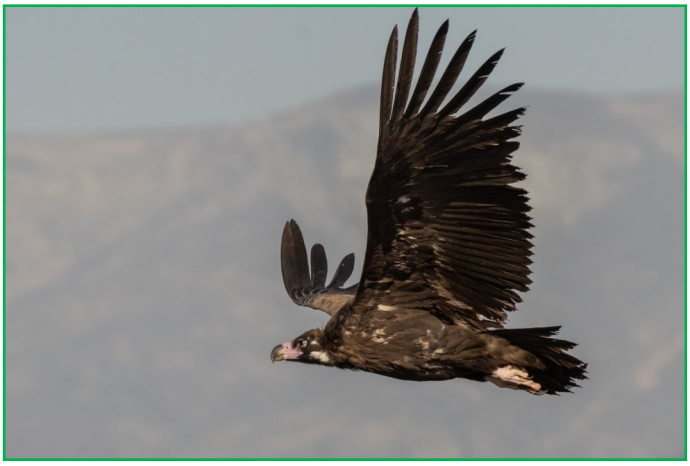
The hotel was close to a river and marshes, and walks produced Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Green Sandpiper, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Snipe, Brown Shrike, Azure Tit, Lesser Whitethroat, Arctic Warbler, Choughs, Asian Brown Flycatchers, Nuthatch and Booted Eagles and Amur Falcon. What a start.

The next day an internal flight took them west to Khovd and then a drive across stony steppe to the foothills of the Altai Mountains and to their Ger camp – luxurious round "tents".

Along the way Asian Desert Warbler, Wheatear, Isabelline Warbler and Hoopoe were amongst the birds seen. Brian showed us great photographs of the bumpy journey and the mountains that they reached. For those of us who have never been on one of these expeditions it was an eye opener to hear that 17 local people are employed to look after nine tour members. The key locals were those searching for the snow leopards in the mountains.

After two days of no sightings the group decided to go up and watch and search. A spotter reported that he had seen signs of the leopards but it was Brian himself

who had the first firm sighting of this elusive animal. With video, photographs and his commentary we shared in his exciting moment. Golden and Booted Eagle, Bearded Vulture, Altai Snowcock, Guldenstadt's Redstart, Black Kites and Black Vulture were amongst the birds seen.



Close to their Ger camp were highland valleys and lakes. In visits to these locations a large range of species were recorded – Mongolian Finches, Lammergeiers, Greenish Warbler, Golden Eagle, Sakar Falcon, Snow Finches, Common Rosefinch in the hills and Red-crested Pochard, Whooper Swan, Marsh Harriers, Black-throated Diver, Paddifield Warbler and 16 species of waders on and around the lakes.

One of the birds that Brian was particularly keen to see was the Mongolian or Henderson's Ground Jay. It is a bird of the open steppe and was proving hard to find, until one was seen sheltering in the shade of a bush before feeding briefly and flying off. On one Steppe journey the group saw 12 Pallas's Sandgrouse. More distant trips across the steppe to larger lakes were rewarded with Golden Plovers, Temminck's Stint, Terrek Sandpipers, Wood Sandpiper, Bearded Tits and Red-necked Phalaropes.

With his great photographs, his sense of humour and his knowledge gained about Mongolia, Brian gave us a really enjoyable talk.

Richard Poyer

# Field Trip Report

## St Abbs Head

Nine of the club gathered for a 10 o'clock start at the St Abbs National Trust Nature Reserve. It was to be a sunny day, with occasional fresh gusts from the NW. Traditionally, this trip is led by our chair Richard; however other commitments meant this year he couldn't make it.

We began by chatting to Ciaran Hatsel, the chief ranger on the reserve. He gave us an overview of the bird life, plus a list of likely flora and fauna we would see. After this interesting introduction we started our quest.

We followed last year's route, leaving the visitor centre and heading north up the dramatic coast line and then ascending the wee hills in order to remain coastal, topping out in the vicinity of the lighthouse. During this walk we saw the usual collection of sea birds and took in some very spectacular views.

Stopping at the Lighthouse we lunched overlooking the walled garden (spotting a resident Roe Deer), with sightings so far being just the expected species, although our list was steadily increasing.

At one point we did pause to think though, as this bunch of North Northumberland's elite ornithologists took 10 full minutes to eventually nail the ID of a juvenile stonechat (or was it a spotted flycatcher lol).

After lunch we admired the busy cliffs north of the lighthouse, rammed with fulmar, razorbill, guillemots, and gannets, before descending to the Myre Loch.

Here, we decided our strategy would be to employ a pincer movement, with some heading down the east bank with views to the Loch and the shrubs, and the rest heading down the west path for woodland species. Both groups amassed a fair tally from their efforts. At the outflow to the Loch, unsuccessful searches were made for resident Brown Angus butterflies.

We took the upper road back to the Centre, finishing with chats over coffees and ice creams in the hot sunshine. A very enjoyable few hours of birdwatching, amassing a figure of 55 species.

Neil Hinchliff

Species seen:

Mallard, Tufted Duck, Common Eider, Common Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Little Grebe, Rock Dove, Feral Pigeon, Common Woodpigeon, Common Swift, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Razorbill, Common Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Common Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Common Raven, Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Skylark, Barn Swallow, Western House Martin, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Eurasian Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Eurasian Wren, Common Starling, Eurasian Blackbird, Spotted Flycatcher, European Robin, European Stonechat, Northern Wheatear, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Common Chaffinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Linnet, European Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Common Reed Bunting.

# Bird Sighting Records

**Below are the highlights for June...**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Egyptian Goose | 1 at River Coquet on 13th | PCA |
| Goosander | 9 at Rothbury on 8th (Female with 8 young) | JMcC |
| Nightjar | 2 at Lemmington Bank on 26th | P&AH |
| Cuckoo | 1 at Long Nanny on 14th, 15th and 20th | PCA |
| Avocet | 1 at Long Nanny on 22nd and 28th | PCA |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 8 at Newton Scrape on 28th | PCA |
| Knot | 2 at Long Nanny on 7th and 11 on 5th | PCA |
| Little Gull | 1 at Long Nanny on 13th | PCA |
| Bridled Tern | 1 at Coquet Island on 4th June | NH |
| Black Tern (American) | 1 at Long Nanny on 12th and 20th | PCA |
| Arctic Skua | 1 at Holy Island on 6th | PCA |
| Spoonbill | 1 at Holy Island on 20th | PCA |
| Spoonbill | 1 at Warkworth Dunes on 23rd | PCA |
| Barn Owl | 1 at Beadnell on 22nd | PCA |
| Short-eared Owl | 1 at Holy Island on 6th | PCA |
| Peregrine | 1 at Bamburgh | NH |
| Grasshopper Warbler | 3 at Warkworth Dunes on 23rd | PCA |
| Blackcap | 1 Branton on 1st and 2 on 13th | JMcC |
| Blackcap | 1 at Chathill on 8th and 22nd | PCA |
| Garden Warbler | 1 at Branton on 1st | JMcC |
| Garden Warbler | 1 at Fenwick Granary on 2nd | PCA |
| Goldcrest | 1 at Dechant Woods on 23rd | PCA |
| Spotted Flycatcher | 2 at Chathill on 22nd | PCA |
| Siskin | 1 at Branton on 1st and 2 on 8th | JMcC |
| Siskin | 2 at Lemmington Hall on 27th | P&AH |

**Contributors**

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)

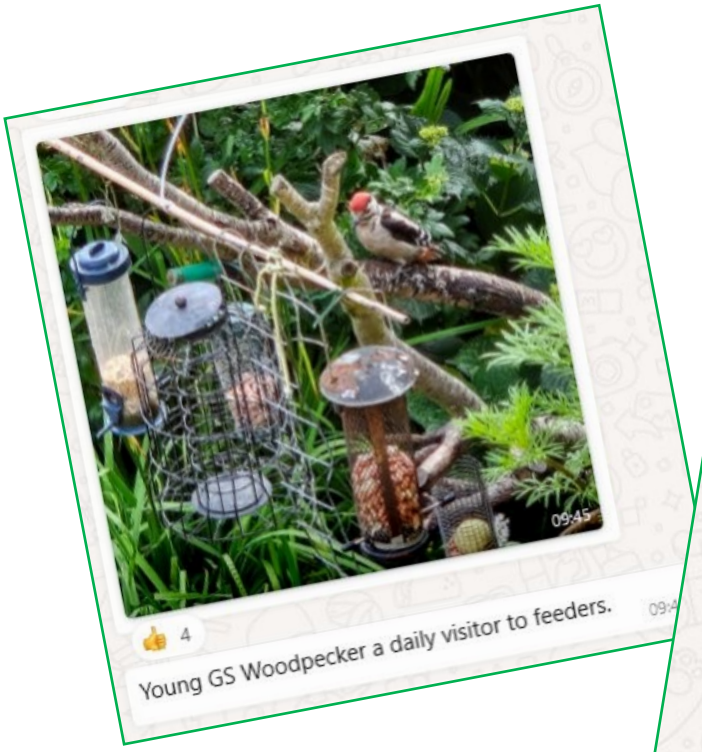
**North Northumberland Bird Club's** area is between the River Tweed in the north and the River Coquet in the south, east to the sea and west to the Northumberland county border.

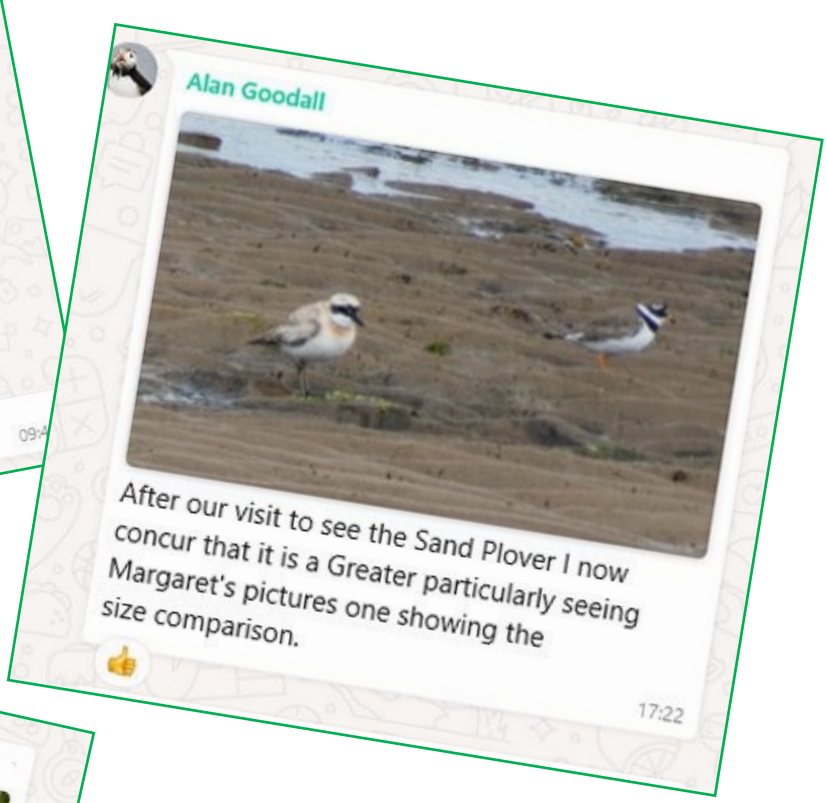
Please send sighting records to **Paul Armstrong** NNBCrecords@yahoo.com by 1st of next month.
If you want a bird adding to the highlights list, you will need to submit the species, location, date(s) and count, together with any comments. If you just want it added to the species list, then you only need to submit the name of the bird.

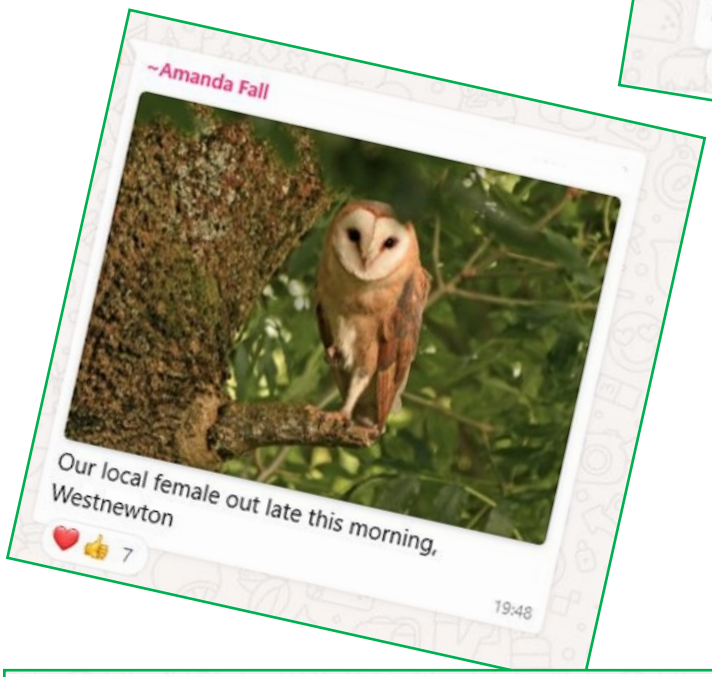
# What's Up on WhatsApp

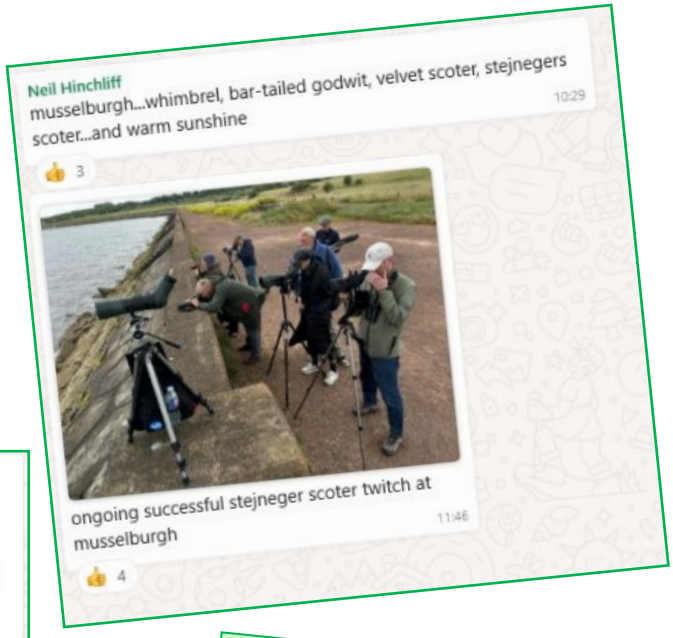
**NNBC Chat - A quick look at some of the recent posts on the club's WhatsApp Group**

The group currently has 54 members. If you would like to join please email me and I'll send you a link.



A question raised by Kathryn prompted the idea for this page.... let us know if you like it?

## Long Nanny American Black Tern

In 2020 the National Trust Tern Site at the Long Nanny was visited by a vagrant American Black Tern and this year it returned again for its fifth consecutive summer.

In previous years it has attracted lots of attention - particularly from avid bird-watchers, as it was the first UK record of an American Black Tern in breeding plumage, however this year it became even more of a celebrity. It had been assumed that the bird was a male as it was often seen in previous years bringing in fish and attempting to attract female Arctic Terns resulting in the National Trust seasonal Rangers naming the bird Nigel. On 24th May this year and on subsequent occasions, it was seen copulating with a male Arctic Tern thus confirming that Nigel was in fact a female and is now known as Nigella.

This pairing is a previously unknown and highly unlikely occurrence between these species, but in the following days Nigella laid three eggs in the Tern garden which is adjacent to the Ranger's hut. Dr Chris Redfearn of Newcastle University examined the eggs on 11th June and described them as being smaller than an Arctic Tern egg, the base colour was a greener shade and the eggs were more pointed. This confirmed that the eggs had been laid by Nigella!!!

The news resulted in unprecedented numbers of visitors to the site. On one occasion there were 96 visitors, 91 on another occasion and several days when visitor numbers were in the 40s, 50s 60s and 70s. In particular, photographers were able to get excellent photos as the nest was so close and bird-watchers were also delighted to get such good views from the Tern site viewing platform.

Nigella and her Arctic Tern partner shared egg sitting duties and then it was a matter of waiting to see if the eggs were viable. The normal incubation period for both Black Terns and Arctic Terns is 21/23 days, but after this period had expired it became less likely that the eggs were going to hatch.

On 2nd July Dr Redfearn fitted both birds with green colour rings so that if the couple return next year and attempt to mate then we will know they are the same pair. It is hoped this may also determine where the American Black Tern migrates to when she leaves the Long Nanny.

On 12th July we noticed that the male Arctic Tern only spent 14 minutes on the nest compared to Nigella spending several hours there, but on 13th July neither bird was seen.

It will be interesting to see what the 2025 Tern season brings.

Alan Goodall - Volunteer Long Nanny Ranger
Photographs by Margaret Goodall - Volunteer Long Nanny Ranger

## A Ringer's Year - June 2024

The Monitoring of nesting Blue Tits, Great Tits, Coal Tits, Redstarts and Marsh Tits, who all use boxes continued into June and we located a new species this year at Ingram. This was in a very unsuccessful treecreeper box that has previously only ever held a brood of Great Tits! However, despite the box being in a dreadful condition it lived up to its name and produced a nest of Treecreepers. The eggs were spotted on the 10/5/24; they were starting to hatch on the 27/5/24 (when the female was ringed) and 6 pulli were ringed on the 2/6/24. It often surprises people when I explain that most of our local birds have finished nesting now.

It mostly happens in May and is all over by the middle of June. A notable exception is the Tree Sparrow. I have just ringed a second brood, of four, in a box on the wall of our house and the parents will probably go on and have a third brood.

We don't ring many 'open' nests because finding them is difficult and very time consuming. Local folks do tell us about nests of young birds; although usually when they are so big it would be dangerous to ring them. Finding them used to be associated with 'egg collecting' but is now something of a lost art (thankfully)!

However, when methodically checking small nest boxes near Longhorsley my compatriot Hilary found a Song Thrush nest very close-by. The photo shows the eggs hatching on 25/5/24.

The weather seems to have finally settled down and made it possible to get on with checking all our Barn Owl boxes. although at the time of writing there were still a few boxes that required access across fields that were just too wet at the start of the month.

The result of the mixed-up late winter/early spring weather is also that Barn Owl nesting is all 'strung out' with some pairs having not yet laid eggs, others incubating, some with tiny young, and some with young big enough to ring - although I don't think any have fledged yet. A Coast Care Box put up at Howick in 2022 is on schedule with its first nest. We located the female (probably three years old) with four small young on the 28/5/24, and returning on the 23/6/24 she was still in residence [GY85088] and with two healthy young. These have now been ringed as GY85095 & 96. They will still be in the box for another month at least.

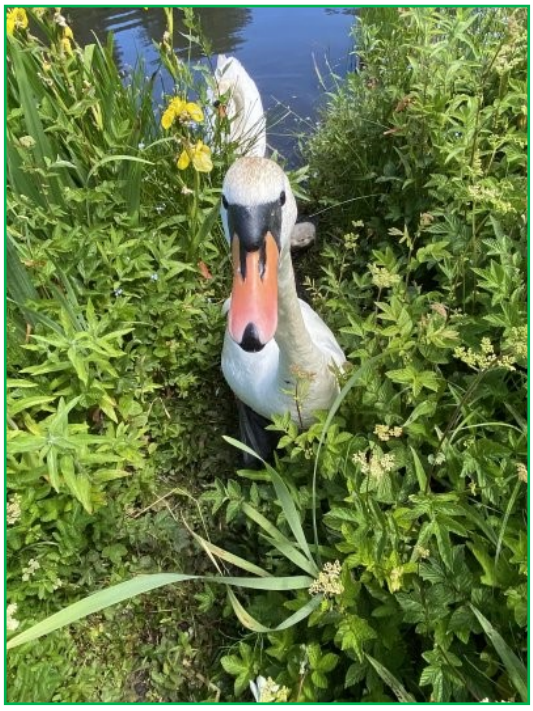
# Ringer's Roundup

Meanwhile the owl box at Rock which had several Wood Mice in store last month continues to surprise, with the adults having brought in a half-grown rat for their owlet's tea.

Generally, Barn Owls find rats too big and leave them to Tawny Owls! I also got asked to check out some possible nesting Barn Owls at RAF Boulmer and we was able to locate a successful nest in an old ammunition box. There was so many years of accumulated owl pellets and other rubbish that the poor owlets are living in a space barely 15 cm high, so I have made a note to return when this brood have fledged and clean their box out so that next year, they have a lot more space!

As noted above its going to be some time before we can really judge how well this year's Barn Owls have done, but it's likely we might be looking at an occupancy of around 50% which is a definite improvement on the last couple of years.

Not being able to visit Howick for several weeks, it was good to see on the 24th that the pair had hatched two cygnets and the male swan was quite uncertain if he should come right up to me demanding food or try to hide his offspring from me! This behaviour did make it possible for me to feed him a small amount of bread by hand – while throwing duck pellets over his head for the female. Bread in particular is best kept away from cygnets until they are much bigger. Sad to report that by the 29th they were down to one cygnet; we don't know what happened to the other one.

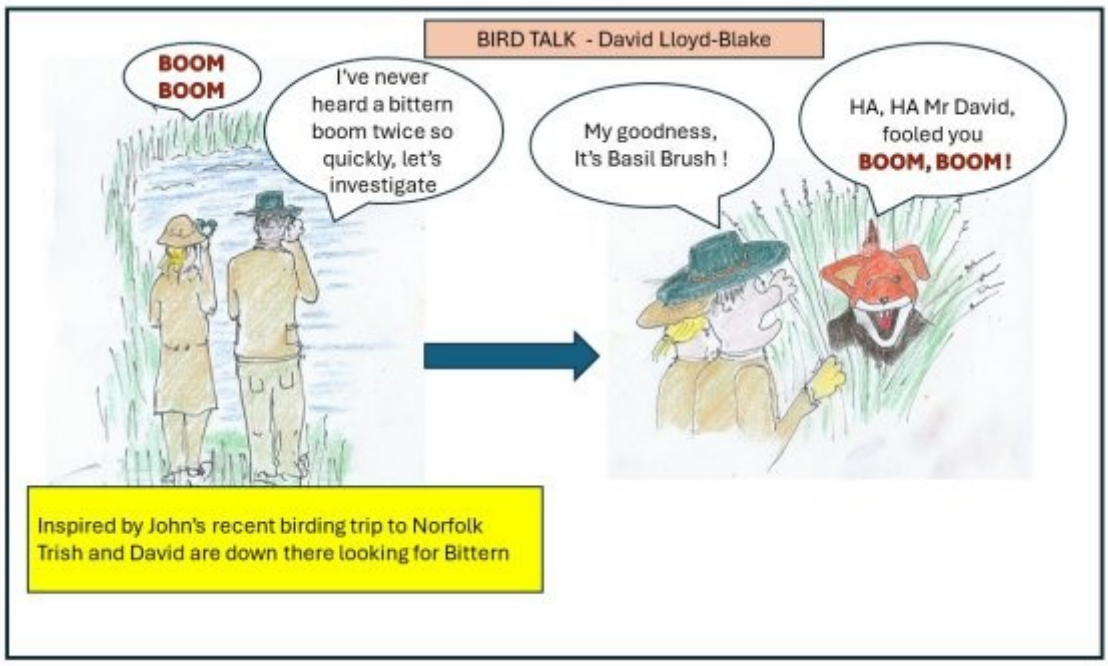


I am currently playing a 'swift caller' outside my house by the new Swift Boxes but there have been no prospecting birds yet. Birds look for nest sites a year in advance of using them. It's hoped that some will find boxes in Longhorsley where a lot more boxes have been put up.

Anyone interested in ringing is invited to get in-touch: we start regular morning ringing at Howick provisionally on the 19th July; then most Friday and Saturday mornings into the Autumn.

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

# Epilogue




Did you know you can get WhatsApp on your PC?

Go to https://www.whatsapp.com/download

A message from John Lumby that you may have missed:

***Annstead Hide Summer Visits to look for Skua's & Shearwater's etc***

*Starting on Monday 15th July meet at 9 am on King Street, Seahouses, just past King Field Road left turn, go further 50m to unnamed road on left turn, where my car will be parked, (Golf Club is another 75m). Coming from Beadnell turn is 1st on right! We will then walk across course to the hide. The idea is to give members a weekly chance to look for seabird passage from the hide! Each week the date (weather dependent) will be posted on WhatsApp.*

*John Lumby 01665 720654*

Please note:

John has said there is not much room in the hide for tripods, so a hide clamp would be advisable.

*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.