October Newsletter

Speaker Alan Yeomans

Black Winged Stilt - Titchwell, Norfolk
Neil Hinchliff

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Club Information

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John Lumby

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Kevin Lever

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.

"In order to see birds, it is necessary to become a part of the silence ."
Robert Lynd

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

Noticeboard

Subscription Reminder

Please note that Membership Subscriptions were due on 1st September and if you haven't yet paid these are now ***Overdue!***

Annual General Meeting

Please note that the club's ***Annual General Meeting*** takes place on the club meeting night on 8th November.

Upcoming Field Trips

Sunday 20th October 2024
Holy Island - Led by Neil
Meeting in main car park at 9.45 (safe crossing from 9.30). Finishing for safe return by 3.00pm.

Nov 2024
Low Newton - Details to follow

Dec 2024
Musselburgh - Details to follow

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 11th Oct at 19:30
A year in the life of a Morpeth Swift
With **Graham Sorrie**

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

Friday 13th Dec at 19:30
Tanagers to Tinamous' (A Glimpse at the Birds and other Wildlife in Colombia)
with **Tom Cadwallander**

See web site for details of other Meetings

The Graham Bell Trophy

A photographic competition for members. The simple rules are:

1. Open to all members of NNBC
2. Digital photographs of a bird or birds taken at any time, any place
3. Species and location to be provided with entries
4. A maximum of two 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

Entries to be sent to Alan Yeomans (a.yeomans720@btinternet.com) 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!

A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

Use boiling water rather than chemical detergents for scouring and cleaning bird tables and nest boxes - simpler, cheaper and safer!
Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

Speaker's Presentation

The Wildlife of Costa Rica with Alan Yeomans

At our September meeting at Bamburgh Pavilion our members and guests were entertained by our very own committee member and treasurer, Alan Yeomans with a photographic presentation of the Wildlife of Costa Rica when he visited in 2022.

Costa Rica is a small country in Central America and although it is only about the size of Wales it is home to 5% of the existing biodiversity in the entire world and over 25% of the country is composed of conservation and naturally protected territory and is particularly known for its incredible wildlife particularly over 800 species of birds.

Alan's first photograph was the Buff-throated Saltator followed by a photograph of the Clay-coloured Thrush which is the national bird of Costa Rica. With its rather uninteresting looking brown-grey plumage it is not the most exciting national symbol in comparison to the pictures we were subsequently shown of some stunning birds but its melodic song is said to be the inspiration for it being chosen as the national symbol.

We were then shown photos of three beautiful hummingbirds, the Green Thorntail, the Brown Violet-ear and the Brilliant Green-crowned and the distinctive Prong-billed Barbet, followed by the Emerald Toucanet which is the smallest of the Toucan family.

The group then travelled to their next venue and enroute saw a Caiman which can be anything from 1 to 5 metres in length.

During the presentation we were shown images of birds in the Tanager family of which there are several species. The Tanagers we were shown were the Blue-grey, the Scarlet-rumped, the Silver-throated, the Golden-hooded, the Cherrie's and the Masked Tanager which, as their names imply are colourful birds.

Probably the most stunning photographs we were shown were the colourful Toucans with their disproportionately huge bills. We were shown Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari and Yellow-throated Toucan. Alan also photographed the equally colourful Scarlet Macaws and Green Macaws which interbreed producing mostly infertile offspring but also fertile offspring which could further interbreed producing hybrids and apparently the government have introduced a law saying that the offspring must be either killed or caged to prevent further interbreeding.

They visited a location to see Vultures which were lured to the area by leaving pig's heads on the ground and sure enough Black Vultures and the larger King Vultures were photographed at close range.

Speaker's Presentation

One of the most sought after sightings by bird watchers is the Sunbittern and Alan was fortunate to see one in a stream just prior to arriving at the Arenal Volcano National Park. He was able to get lovely photos of the Sunbittern spreading its wings to reveal the striking "sun" chestnut coloured wing pattern. A "must see" bird for bird watchers visiting Costa Rica.

Another "must see" bird is the Resplendent Quetzal but unfortunately Alan didn't see one on his last visit, however he did see it when he went to Costa Rica in 2017 and his photos of both the male and female were stunning, showing the mostly glittering green plumage, elongated tail and the crest and bright red underparts of the male.

In addition to the avifauna of Costa Rica it is also home to lots of reptiles some of which are extremely colourful, as demonstrated by Alan's close-up photographs, such as the Boa Constrictor, the Halloween Snake, the Neotropical Rattlesnake, the highly venomous Fer-de-Lance, the Jumping Pit Viper and the False Coral Snake which imitates the appearance of a venomous snake though is doesn't actually produce toxins itself. Other reptiles photographed were Banded Gecko and Lizards.

Costa Rica is also famous for its colourful Frogs such as the Red-eyed Tree Frog, the Green and Black Poison Dart Frog and the Blue Jeans Poison Dart Frog and we were shown close-up images of these tiny creatures.

Mammals photographed were Agouti, Spider Monkeys, White-faced Monkey with its Baby, Variegated Squirrel and the Coati which is probably the country's most famous mammal known for being playful and mischievous.

The camera that Alan used for his superb photos was a Canon R5 with a 100-500 lens.

Report by Alan Goodall.

Field Trip Report

RSPB Saltholme Reserve led by John Lumby. Sunday 15th September 2024

RSPB Saltholme in the Tees Valley is a wildlife haven set in a spectacular industrial landscape.

Seven members met in the visitor centre, which has panoramic views of the reserve and over coffee ,21 species including Greenshank and a Snipe were spotted to get the day off to a good start. Looking at the sightings board of what had been seen our target species for the day included a White-fronted Goose, Spotted Redshank, Honey Buzzard and Water Rail.

There was a cool breeze as we set off to walk over to the Phil Stead Hide but it was dry and better than had been forecast.

Unbeknown to us John Lumby had acquired “transport” to get round the reserve and was soon out in front leading the way in his all-terrain Tramper!

The Phil Stead hide gave us good viewing of 12 more species including Black tailed Godwit and Ruff.

Then it was onto the Saltholme Pools Hide along the beautiful Dragonfly path where the dragonflies were out in abundance.

Here we spotted a Little Stint and quite a large group of Avocets and the White-fronted Goose. A miserable looking Grey Heron stood on its own in a pool of water when a large eel ventured near its feet. The heron had a couple of half-hearted stabs at it before deciding it was perhaps too early for lunch and left it maybe to return to it later in the day.

Next, we took the path round to Paddy’s Pool hide (while John detoured back to the café for lunch, never too early for him!). Not a great deal to be seen here. Walking on to the Wildlife watchpoint we saw Barnacle and Greylag Geese. We all commented on the lack of passerines around in the trees and hedges.

At the watchpoint the Water Rail made a good appearance for us on the grass between the reeds as well as a Cetti’s Warbler. A large flock of Lapwing also flew in. Tree Sparrows, Blue Tit and Chaffinch were seen on the feeder.

Field Trip Report

On the way back to the visitor centre it was decided that we should go back to the Phil Stead Hide for another quick look to see if anything new had appeared and then take the cars to Dorman's Hide which is just the other side of the A178. The light was good and in the afternoon sun a Spotted Redshank was seen along with a Great Egret and several Little Egrets.

A very enjoyable day, 59 species in total seen. It is a place that we will definitely return to.

Thank you to Neil Hinchliff for the photos.

Reported by Maureen & Chris Cobb

Species List (59):

Greenshank	Curlew	Meadow pipit
Mallard	Swift	Barnacle Goose
Magpie	Wren	Buzzard
Coot	Black tailed Godwit	Greylag Goose
Little Egret	Dunlin	House Martin
Pochard	Grey Heron	Water Rail
Gadwall	Swallow	Cetti's Warbler
Teal	Wood Pigeon	Tree Sparrow
Lapwing	Kestrel	Blue Tit
Little Grebe	Ruff	Chaffinch
Shoveler	Ringed Plover	Sparrowhawk
Moorhen	Pied Wagtail	Pheasant
Redshank	Goldfinch	Cormorant
Wigeon	Little Stint	Great Egret
Starling	Black-headed Gull	Great Black-backed Gull
Snipe	Avocet	Common Gull
Stock Dove	Shelduck	Spotted Redshank
Tufted Duck	White fronted Goose	
Mute Swan	Canada Goose	
Carrion Crow	Herring Gull	
Great Tit	Lesser Black-Backed Gull	

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for September...

Brent Goose	2 at Cullernose on 19th	M&JD
	5 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
	2 at Long Nanny on 11th and 1 on 12th	PCA
	1 at Coquet Esturary on 8th	RP
Barnacle Goose	1 at Low Newton on 5th	M&JD
Velvet Scoter	1 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
Common Scoter	78 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton on 29th	PCA
Grey Plover	1 at Long Nanny on 26th	PCA
	1 at Birling Carrs on 13th	RP
Knot	12 at Coquet Estuary on 8th	RP
	6 at Birling Carrs on 13th	RP
Curlew Sandpiper	4 at Low Newton on 2nd	M&JD
Little Stint	1 at Low Newton on 2nd	M&JD
Redshank	220 at Coquet Estuary on 8th, 253 on 12th	RP
Greenshank	1 at Holy Island Causeway on 24th	PCA
Sabine's Gull	1 at Annstead on 6th	NH
Sandwich Tern	10 at Birling Carrs on 27th	RP
Great Skua	1 at Annstead on 6th	NH
Arctic Skua	3 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
Common Guillemot	6 at Alnmouth Bay on 13th	RP
Red-throated Diver	3 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
	2 at Alnmouth Bay on 13th	RP
Sooty Shearwater	1 at Annstead on 27th	NH
Manx Shearwater	22 at Annstead on 23rd	NH
Sparrowhawk	1 at Bamburgh on 19th	PCA
	1 at Chathill on 9th	PCA
Barn Owl	1 at High Newton on 27th	M&JD
Kingfisher	1 at Howick Pool on 29th	P&AH
Wryneck	1 at Berwick on 8th	NH
Merlin	1 at Beadnell on 11th	PCA
Peregrine	1 at Alnmouth on 14th	M&JD
Red-backed Shrike	1 at Holy Island on 6th	M&JD
	1 at Holy Island on 9th	NH
Jay	2 at Dechant woods on 21st	PCA
Raven	1 at Ford Moss on 7th	PCA
Hume's Warbler	1 at Howick on 29th	P&AH
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 28th	NH
	1 at Howick on 29th	P&AH
	1 at Snook, Holy Island on 24th	PCA
Blackcap	5 at Howick on 20th and 2 on 29th	P&AH
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Holy Island on 28th	NH
Treecreeper	1 at Howick on 20th	P&AH
	1 at Chathill on 3rd	PCA

Bird Sighting Records

Red-breasted Flycatcher	1 at Snook, Holy Island on 24th	PCA
Pied Flycatcher	2 at Holy Island on 6th	M&JD
Whinchat	7 at Holy Island on 6th	M&JD
Wheatear	1 at Long Nanny on 2nd	PCA
Common Rosefinch	1 at Howick on 29th	P&AH

Yellow-Browed Warbler—Phil Hanmer

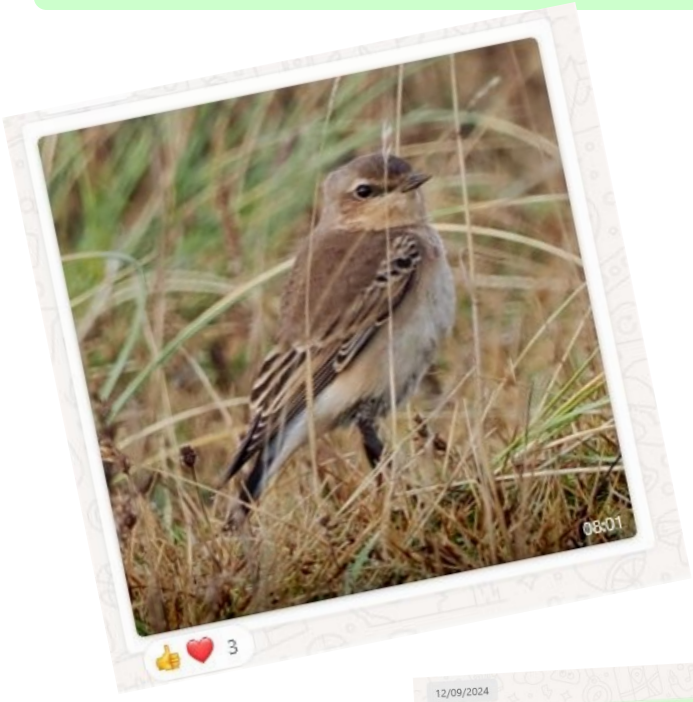
See Ringers Roundup

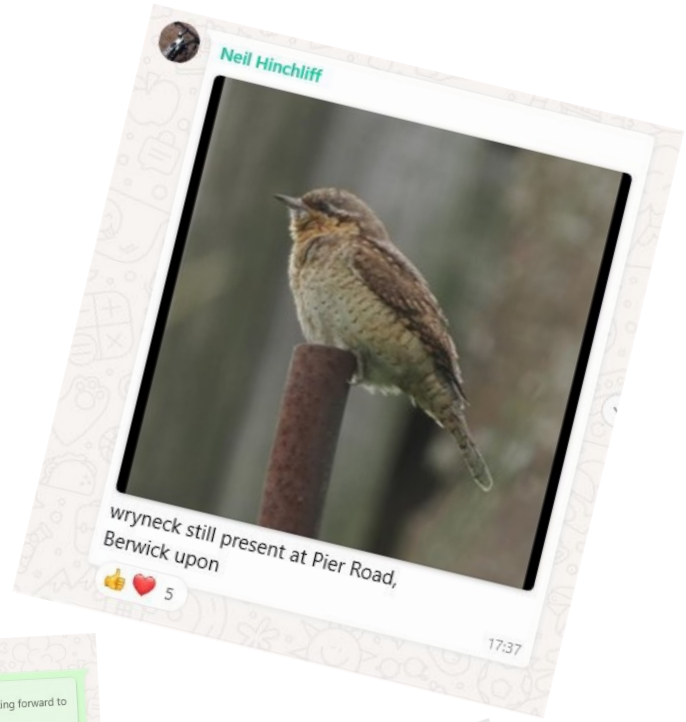
Contributors

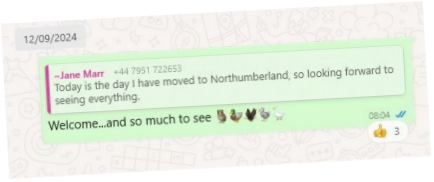
Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Mike & June Drage (M&JD)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
Richard Poyer (RP)

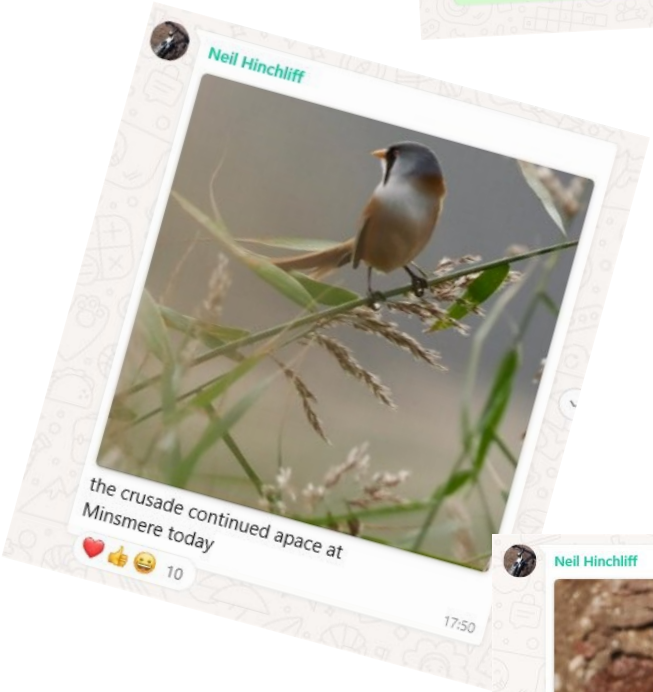
What's Up on WhatsApp

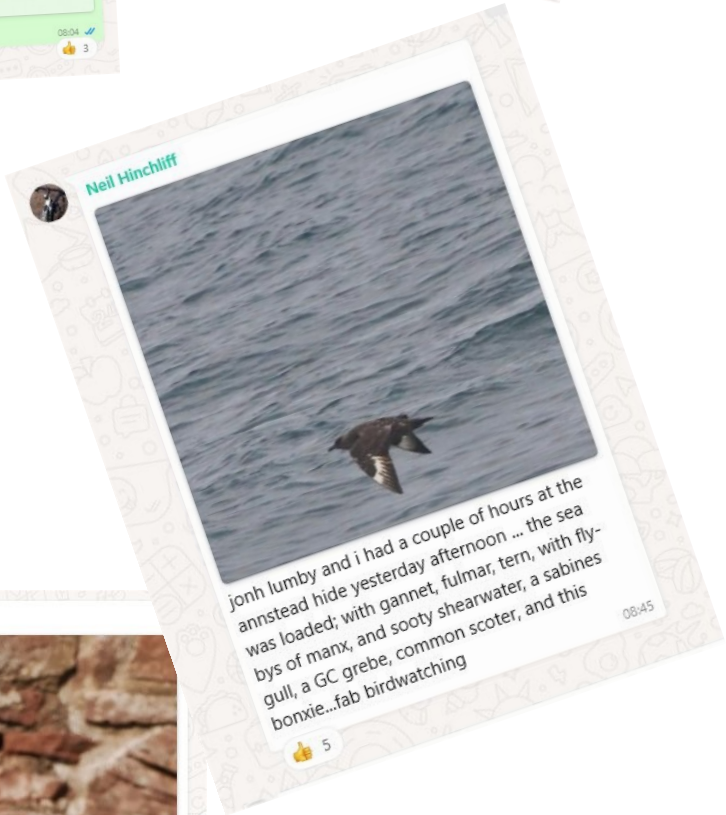
NNBC Chat—A quick look at some of the posts on the club's WhatsApp Group page











Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve
Shorebird Breeding Season 2024 - Diary of a Volunteer

This year's monitoring of Little Terns and Ringed Plovers, the two species which nest regularly on the beaches of the Reserve, began on 1st May.

During the previous weeks the Reserve Staff and Volunteers had roped off chosen areas of Goswick beach, South Ross and the Wide Opens. At Goswick, netting was also erected as by 23rd April 2 pairs of Ringed Plovers were showing signs of interest.

My first duty was on the 1st May. With visibility poor, and rain threatening, little could be seen but the calls of Little Terns overhead was positive! My first encounter with a dog owner was less so, but the arrival of our 'accommodation' being manhandled by this year's 4 new Seasonal Wardens, was a welcome sight! Gone are the days when we had to either lug a tent out on duty with us or shelter behind a dune with a big umbrella! A couple of chairs were also promised-luxury!

The areas we covered were wardened by the 4 Seasonal staff, plus volunteers. Our remit as always, was to record location of nesting Little Terns and Ringed Plovers whilst also noting other species eg this season, Osprey, Shelduck, Hen Harrier, Cuckoo, Whimbrel, Arctic, Sandwich and Common Terns were among many others. We were accompanied by a very confiding Wheatear for a couple of weeks, and also had regular sightings of Dolphin. Low flying light aircraft and microlights are also recorded and reported for follow up by the Reserve Staff.

It is important to engage with visitors to explain the by -laws, to emphasise the importance of the area for breeding waders and to stress the need to avoid disturbance to give the birds the best possible chance.

The birds face huge odds and success or failure depends on weather, tidal heights, sand blow, predation by Fox, Kestrel, Carrion Crow and the larger Gulls. Little Terns are magnificently feisty and it is always a treat to watch them seeing off any threatening gulls or crows with a noisy mass attack and exhibition of astonishing aerobatic skills!

A major threat is dogs. Some beachgoers view the Nature Reserve first and foremost as a recreational area for their pets. There is occasional resentment, but this seems to be becoming less of a problem as the years go by as people accept access is going to be limited between May and August. Although we rarely have any dissent from visitors some locals feel they have a right to go and do as they please irrespective of the fact they are on a Nature Reserve and will ignore, or even destroy signs!

Members' Contributions

Many visitors to the beach are very supportive and ask how things are going and we get to know some quite well over the season.

By mid-May it was all go! The Staff had put out cages, little shelters for chicks, more fencing –some electric - and had sited cameras in specific areas as Ringed Plovers had begun laying while increasing numbers of Little Terns within the netted area were courting, flying in with sand eels for mates, scraping up sand and mating.

On the 19th May our Warden Bex Outram and Volunteer Gill appeared on Countryfile-great publicity! By the end of May the beach was becoming busier! One morning I approached a man with a metal detector, so intent on digging large holes in the sand, he didn't notice me approaching!

I explained metal detecting wasn't allowed on the Reserve but also it was unwise, given the disused ordnance which can still be found there! After proudly showing me a piece of Second World War shell, the highlight of that morning's dig, we agreed it might be a good idea to dig somewhere else apart from the Reserve!

By mid-June, chicks of both species were roaming seawards! At this time a temporary rope is always erected to the water's edge to deter walkers with and without dogs and to protect chicks. This entails a certain amount of us running up and down the beach to put the ropes out and wind them in as the tides rise and fall and is an excellent way of keeping fit! At this time, we are kept busy monitoring the activity of the nesting birds, talking to visitors and watching the antics of the chicks!

With unseasonal weather – strong winds, sand blow and unusual cold, the season continued with increasing numbers of Little Tern scrapes, and increasingly large roosts of gulls, Eiders and Terns on the beach and at the mouth of the River Low. Our hut became a casualty and despite metres of Gaffer tape and rope, was beginning to lean drunkenly! (By the end of the season it was in a sorry state!)

An unusual number of visitors from abroad this year found their way to Goswick, including a delightful family from Grasse in the South of France who were thrilled to find they had chanced on a beautiful warm day and a beach all to themselves! They spent several hours picnicking, taking photographs, swimming and remarking how wonderful it was to be away from the crowds and traffic on the Cote d'Azur!

By the end of July three Kestrels was being seen regularly and unusually, during that time, the Little Terns suddenly disappeared, with only the odd sighting after that. Some chicks had already been predated and clearly the Little Terns had decided to leave.

As a result, the season drew to a close earlier than usual but the final numbers from Goswick, South Ross and the Wide Opens were very encouraging with total of 90 pairs of Little Terns, with 111 fledged-productivity 1.23. Ringed plovers: -24 pairs with 41 fledged with productivity 1.7 for the entire site.

So, we will look forward to seeing what the next season brings! All will depend on tide heights, weather and how the stormy winter tides change the profile of the nesting sites! Monitoring and wardening of such sites have been shown to greatly improve productivity in the above species but more help is always needed!

If anyone feels they could spare just a few hours per week during next year's breeding season please do speak to me or contact the Reserve Office direct on 01289 381470.

Liz Harrison

30th September 2024

Photos courtesy of Liz Harrison and Bex Outram

A Ringer's Year - September 2024

We have continued to ring at Howick Arboretum on Friday and Saturday mornings dodging around the variable weather as best we can. On the 7/9/24 we captured 39 birds (23 new and 16 retraps). Most of the retraps were adult Blue Tits just finishing their full moult; so being prepared for winter. The new birds were much more diverse with what was probably a sibling group of three noisy Mistle Thrushes entering the nets at the same time. Its almost the time of year for us to encounter 'foreign-migrant thrushes' but these three were undoubtedly local given the presence of active Post Juvenile moult in their feathering. There was also an adult female Goldcrest which may have been an incoming migrant but being certain of this with goldcrests is very difficult; as we find both residents and migrants at Howick. Several of this years Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff were also encountered on their way south to migrate.

As I was away watching *Whales*, Hilary led the session on the 13/9/24 and 14th. The 13th yielded 27 birds (16 new and 11 retraps) again all the retraps were tits but the new birds included not just Chiffchaff and Blackcap but also a late Willow Warbler. The 14th yielded 25 birds (15 new and 10 retraps) with one of the retrapped Blue Tits from 2019. The new birds included several young Chiffchaffs, on migration south, along with a Blackcap.

The 20/9/24 was very overcast and cool but we still captured 49 birds (27 new and 22 retraps). The first retraps were three Long Tailed Tits which are almost impossible to age since they undergo a full Main Moult as juveniles rendering their age indeterminate – unless they have been ringed previously. These were all from 2022 when two of them were juveniles. The new birds started with a young Bullfinch then some Long Tailed Tits, which had to be recorded as 'age unknown'. Several Blackcaps were all aged as '3's' i.e. hatched this year as were three Chiffchaffs but we also, more surprisingly, had two distinctly broad tailed adult Chiffchaffs; one of which showed the remains of her 'brood patch' indicating that she had been nesting quite recently. The last bird of the day was a Treecreeper which we also decided was an adult female for the same reason.

The 21/9/24 netted 43 birds (22 new and 21 retraps) including a Great Tit from 2022 with a leg that looks as though it's been broken and then healed. It does not have full movement but seems to be surviving quite well.

There was also a young Great Spotted Woodpecker that we have caught previously when she had a much more 'red tonsure'; these red feathers are now moulting out – and as no new red feathers are growing in at *the back of the head,* I think it's safe to say that this is a female bird (see photo).

The new birds included what were probably our first incoming migrants of the year, not anything rare but five very unusual looking Blackbirds. Their unusual piebald appearance suggesting foreign origins (see photo.).

In the same category were some Song Thrush with unusually long wings which were very vocal about their temporary capture.

We should have ringed on the morning of the 27th but did not due to wind and rain but this did not prevent ten of us gathering on a farm near Longhorsley in the afternoon to ring a brood of swans. The farmer had been 'training them' to come to food for some weeks and the usual tussle and wetting of the human participants involved in this procedure was mostly avoided. We were able to ring six healthy cygnets ranging from 5.35kg's to 7.6kg's in weight (*with the help of an IKEA bag and a fisherman balance!*) and provisionally thought three of them were female. They now all have large coloured darvic rings (white lettering on red) ZLS; ZK4; ZK3; ZKZ; ZK7; ZKV. Swans are long lived and the adult female to this brood is already 20 years old (VAH) having been originally ringed at Tynemouth. If you see a Swan (*any swan*) with a Coloured Ring please make a note of it and pass the details on to me (see photos).

Trying again on the 28th we captured 43 birds (27 new and 16 retraps) including retrapped Goldcrests, a House Sparrow (a bit of a rarity), Bullfinch and Long Tailed Tits. The new birds included Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Wrens, Robins and tits. There was also an exceptionally *grey* adult female Blackbird (see photo.). Scrutiny of two books suggests that such coloration indicates a bird of 'Balkan origin' which is an interesting occurrence.

Ringing on the 29th the Car Park at Howick was full of Goldcrest and Long Tailed Tits hunting spiders in the trees. The crests were probably incoming migrants indicating there may be some more interesting birds had also just landed. We captured 56 birds (43 new and 13 retraps). The retraps included an adult female Chiffchaff we had first ringed almost a year ago who still had the remains of her brood-patch suggesting she had nested locally. So, she was hatched at Howick, migrated to Africa, then returned and probably raised at least two broods herself.

Things were slow until 10:30 when Allan one of my C Ringers brought in what he thought was a Yellow-browed Warbler (a rare but regular migrant on passage from the Ural Mtns going southwards). However, on scrutiny by

myself and Wendy (our experienced scribe) we realised that this was not a classic *yellow-brow*. It had only one Wing-bar (not two); it was a dullish washed-out bird (not crisp and bright); and on turning open both the picture books and a Ringers Reference Book and taking some biometric measurements we concluded it was the related but rarer Hume's Leaf Warbler (see photo.). This bird breeds in the wooded mountains of inner Asia and should be migrating south to winter in India.

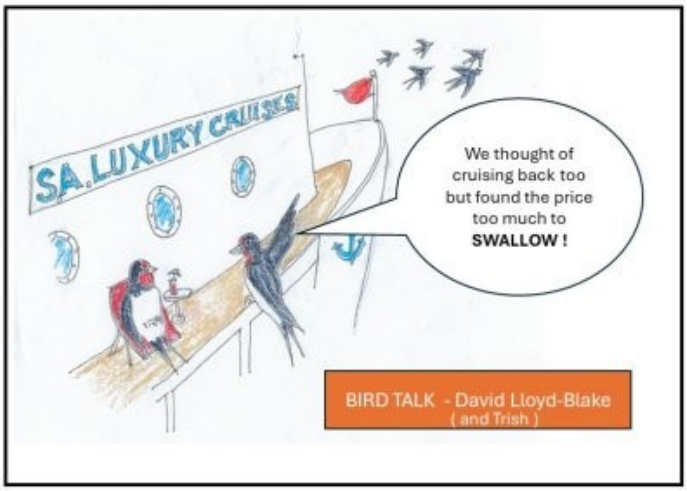
We then went onto catch twelve more Chiffchaffs and an actual Yellow-browed Warbler with the more classic appearance (see photo on page 10).

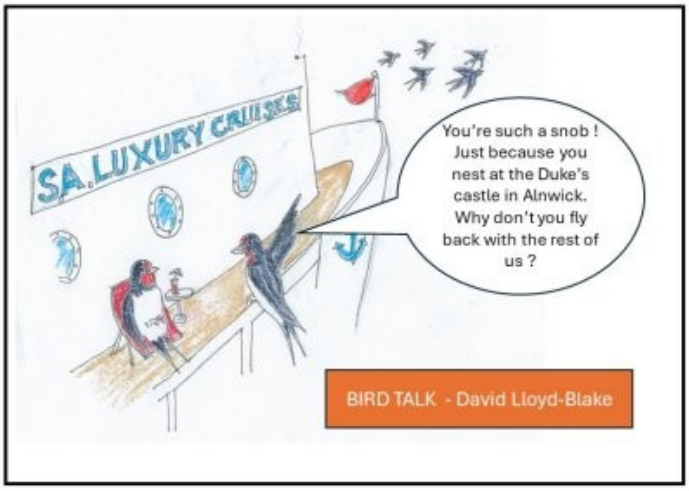
After a brief lull we had an influx of half a dozen Blackbirds (again probably incoming migrants) followed by our third rarity of the day. This was a very inconspicuous bird that looked like a *not-quite right goldfinch or bullfinch* (we had already caught six Bullfinch during the morning). After some scrutiny we realised this was a so called 'Common' Rosefinch; a very soft brown finch with a stout bill! This finch breeds in Eastern Europe from Sweden south to the Danube, the Caucasus and much further East. They normally winter in India (see photo.)

After an exciting morning encountering *a fall of birds* migrating south, I also wanted to note that there were two Red Admiral Butterflies and a larger number of Specked Woods about near the Cricket Pavilion at Howick.

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

Epilogue





One joke 2 punchlines - which would you choose?

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!

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.