November Newsletter

Speaker Graham Sorrie

Ivory Gull - Svalbard Peninsular
Steve Newman

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Club Information

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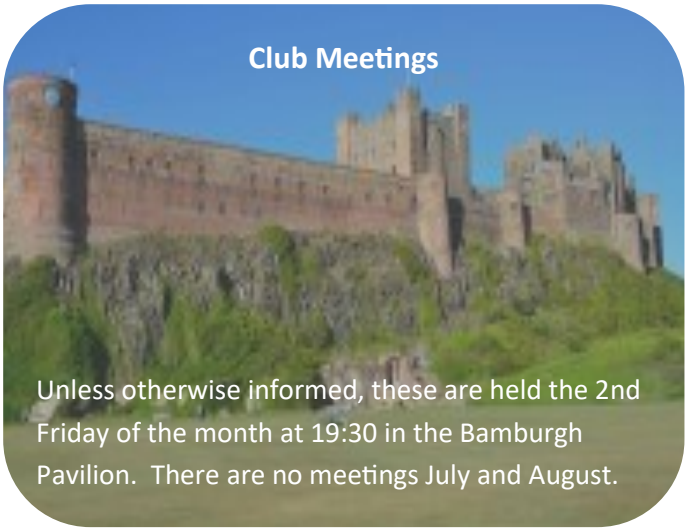

Club Meetings

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.

"Not humans, but birds often witness the most beautiful mornings in this world!."

Mehmet Murat İldan

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Check out our Internet presence

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

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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 well ***Overdue!***

Any members who have not renewed by ***14th November*** *will be removed from our lists and from NNBC Chat*

Upcoming Field Trips

Thursday 21st Nov 2024
Low Newton, Led by Paul Ashdown. Meet 09:00 at the Tin Church. May split into 2 groups depending on how many participants.

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 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**

Friday 10th Jan 2025 at 19:30
Northumberland's Birds with **Tim Dean**

See web site for details of other Meetings

The Graham Bell Trophy

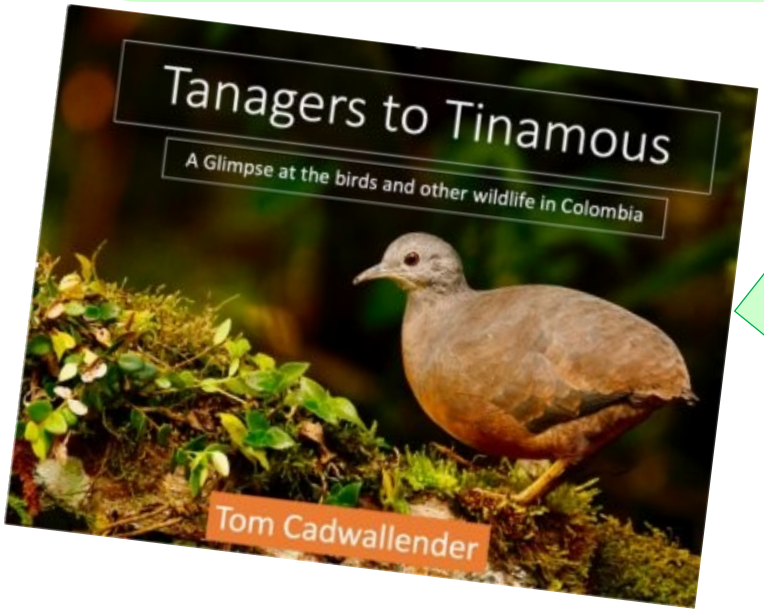
A photographic competition for members. The simple rules are:

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 little taster! The title slide from Tom Cadwallender's talk at our December 13th Meeting. And remember there's mulled wine!

A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

You may notice an increase in Blackbirds in your garden at this time of year, particularly if you live by the coast. This is due to immigration of birds coming to spend winter here from colder climes. You can help them (and other members of the Thrush family) by putting out old or rotten apples and pears, or parts thereof!

Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

Speaker's Presentation

A year in the life of a Morpeth Swift with Graham Sorrie

Our busy October meeting at Bamburgh Pavilion had a theme far less exotic than many we have enjoyed, as our speaker, Graham Sorrie, told the story of Morpeth's Swifts. Graham's fascinating talk took these seemingly familiar birds and showed them to us in a new light. As we went through their year, starting with their arrival in Morpeth ready to breed, he constantly surprised me with little gems of knowledge that captivated us all.

I already knew that swifts live their life on the wing, feeding, moulting and even sleeping high above us. But new to most of us, Graham explained that they are so well adapted for flight that, after fledging, they can stay fully aloft for several years, travelling huge distances in search of food across Europe and Africa. And then when they finally get ready to breed, they touch-down to investigate a nest-site, only to be infested by the most horrible looking lice that have been lurking in wait just for them. Specialist evolution has its down-side!

Lice aside, Graham showed us that swift anatomy and biology are unlike almost any other bird. With only forward- facing toes they cannot perch, only scabble up vertical stone, wood and brick. They can swivel their wings to create lift on both up and down stroke, showing kindred with hummingbirds. Nestlings, facing harsh conditions and a shortage of food, can enter a sort of torpor and suspend their development while their parents travel international distances to fill their specially adapted mouths with a "bolus" of insect paste. No wonder Graham is rather fanatical about "his" swifts. What amazing characters they are.

Graham's knowledge comes from years nurturing the swift colony centred on his house. This had declined to one nest in the eaves when he started adding specialist nest boxes to the walls. Now, the photos he shared show a house encrusted with multiple boxes, and a colony spreading out to neighbouring properties, testament to his enthusiasm infecting others. Many of us in the audience would like to have a little bit of this swift-action too. Most of the questions over the evening were from club members asking for advice on how to get swifts to move into boxes added to our homes. Answers covered: practicalities (at least 4m up, big clear drop underneath, doesn't matter which elevation); competition (they will chuck sparrows out, but wait nicely for starlings to fledge) and sound track (Graham not too sure that playing swift

Speaker's Presentation

calls works very well at all, but worth a go). In the end it came down to a mantra he repeated several times: nothing attracts swifts like swifts. They like a loose colony, and those of us with empty boxes just need to be patient, and hope that a passing, newly mature adult spots our des-res. In the mean-time, House Sparrows need help too!

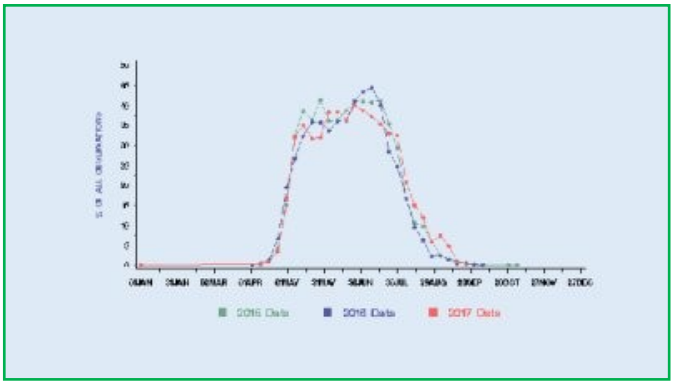
Graham's work with swifts has also included some of the scientific field-work that we have seen in talks about other species like eagles and terns. Ringing the nestlings has allowed him to build up data on productivity, lifespan, and loyalty to nest sites. Hot news for this talk was some work he has been doing with the RSPB to use satellite transmitters on swifts. The idea was to use these to identify where the birds feed, but one tagged bird "did a runner" and wasn't re-caught until the subsequent year. This meant that the data on the device it had carried showed the full migration route for the bird. I think for most of us, this was the most eye-opening bit of the talk. The RSPB had produced an animation showing the line of flight down to Spain, (re-fuelling break), then out into the Atlantic and down the side of the Sahara, along the West African Coast and across to Mozambique and Tanzania. Then all the way back.

Knowing all this about the screaming mob of birds that whizz around our village at the end of summer makes me even keener to lure one into our nestboxes. Until then, I will have to make-do with Graham's stories and pictures.

Morpeth Swift Conservation

Year	Total Occupied sites	Breeding pairs (est)*	Breeding pairs checked	Pullus ringed	Pullus/ pair of checked pairs	Adult ringed	Est Max Total pullus
2015	7	5		2		0	8
2016	10	6	2	4		1	12
2017	12	11	8	15	1.88	0	19 (+ 3 dead)
2018	13	11 (1 loss)	5	13	2.60	5	23
2019	15	14	11	19	1.75	5	27
2020	17	15	11	21	1.90	0	30
2021	19	18	16	25	1.56	0	32
2022	24	23	21	45	2.14	2	49
2023	27	25	23	38	1.65	2	42
2024	18	15	13	19	1.46	2	21

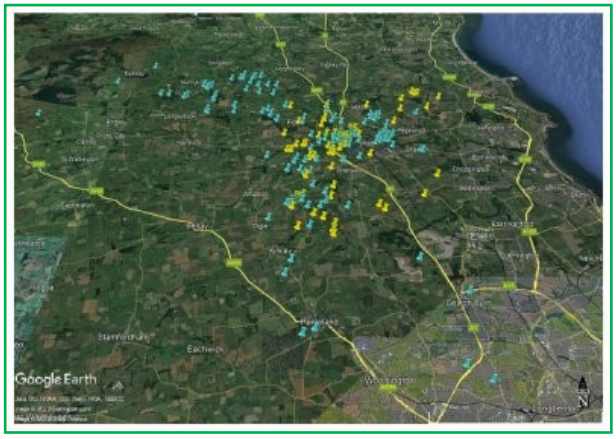
* Includes inaccessible sites



Perhaps by the time he comes back to us with an update, some of us will have got lucky.

The link for John Stimpson Swift boxes is in the nest box section at www.swift-conservation.org

If you fancy your own swift box, Phil Hamner can build some to order for the bargain price of £20. Contact details below. If you want to build your own, the plans for the model he uses, the Bristol Swift Box, are on the website and he says that they are quite straightforward.



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Field Trip Report

Holy Island led by Neil Hinchliff. Sunday 27th September 2024

This event was due to take place on the previous Sunday, but thanks to storm Ashley, all was rearranged to today. It was a sunny blue sky morning, with the chance of showers forecast later in the afternoon. Kevin and Neil had driven over the causway much earlier, and instead of twiddling our thumbs, we began noting species for today's count.

All met at the pre-arranged 09:45, where introductions and plans were made. Amazingly, 26 folk had chosen to come along to today's field trip, which subtly reduced route options a little as all wishes and abilities had to be taken into consideration. We also welcomed half a dozen newer members to the day. It was decided that we would all stick together-ish; stringing along happily and naturally as sightings demanded, but with useful walkie-talkie communications between extremes.

Due to last night's return to winter hours, it was officially almost noon as we wound along Straight Lonnen. Midway, we all locked on to a female hen harrier quartering the distant dunes. E xiting the Lonnen, the immediate dunes, wilderness, and quarry ahead were new to some, and beyond these we checked out the sea, discovering a Red-Throated Diver. Ness Head then led us down onto Sandham Bay where we wandered at will, with waders on the shore to our left, and a late snow bunting on the right at the top of the beach. Making a bee-line for the Lough Hide, and commandeered it for lunch.

Afterwards, we headed back to the village via Crooked Lonnen as a cool wind and light cloud gathered overhead. Back at the village, a few had to depart, however, the rest of us went on a tour of the village. Sadly, the "Window on Wild Lindisfarne" viewing station was closed...probably as from this very morning!

Field Trip Report

We then scanned the harbour bay, picking up Bar-Tailed and Black-Tailed Godwits, plus Grey Plover. After zig-zagging through the village we visited the Priory grounds, and the Vicar's Garden, but as all leaves had now fallen, few birds were seen. A few more of our group had to depart at this point, leaving 10 or so to take the coastal path to Chare Ends; where there was much movement in Brent Geese and Golden Plover.

Our final piece of action was a Kestrel, attacking and feeding on a bird just metres away. A really enjoyable trip, with lovely people....with the count for the day being 68.

Neil Hinchliff

Photos Courtesy of Neil, Phil and Alison Hanmer and Ian Wilson

Species List:

bar-tailed godwit
black-headed gull
black-tailed godwit
blackbird
bluetit
carrion crow
chaffinch
collared dove
common gull
coot
cormorant
curlew
eider
gannet
golden plover
goldfinch
great black-backed gull
greenshank
grey heron
grey plover
grey wagtail
guillemot
hereing gull
house sparrow
jackdaw
kestrel
lapwing
linnet
little egret
little grebe
magpie
mallard
mippit
moorhen
mute swan
oystercatcher
pheasant
pied wagtail
pin-footed goose
purple sandpiper
raven
razorbill
red-breasted merganser
red-throated diver
redshank
redwing
reed bunting
ringed plover
robin
rock pipit
rook
sanderling
water rail
snow bunting
shag
skylark
snipe
starling
stonechat
teal
tree sparrow
turnstone
wigeon
wood pigeon
wren
brent goose
barnacle goose
hen harrier

plus

roe deer
red admiral
grey seal

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for October...

Scaup	1 at River Coquet on 11th	PCA
Velvet Scoter	2 at Bamburgh on 19th	NH
White-winged Scoter	1 at Bamburgh on 19th	NH
White-winged Scoter	1 at Stag Rocks on 24th	PCA
Water Rail	1 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Water Rail	1 at Holy Island on 27th	P&AH
Water Rail	1 at Howick on 3rd and 10th	P&AH
Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on 12th	PCA
Great Crested Grebe	3 at Alnmouth Bay on 7th and 1 on 26th	RP
Grey Plover	2 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Grey Plover	21 at Birling Carrs on 30th	RP
Ruff	1 at Warkworth on 17th	RP
Greenshank	3 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Greenshank	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Little Gull	3 at Stag Rocks on 24th	PCA
Red-throated Diver	1 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Red-throated Diver	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Red-throated Diver	3 at Alnmouth Bay on 7th and 26th	RP
Sparrowhawk	1 at Chathill on 4th and 10th	PCA
Hen Harrier	1 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Hen Harrier	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Hen Harrier	1 at Holy Island on 27th	P&AH
Hoopoe	1 at Holy Island on 8th	NH
Hoopoe	1 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
Kingfisher	1 at Howick on 3rd	P&AH
Kingfisher	1 at Birling Carrs on 7th	RP
Jay	1 at Dechant Woods on 5th	PCA
Raven	1 at Holy Island on 27th	JMcC
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 at Howick on 4th	P&AH
Blackcap	1 at Howick on 4th, 10th and 18th	P&AH
Firecrest	1 at Holy Island on 17th	NH
Treecreeper	1 at Howick on 18th	P&AH
Siberian Stonechat	1 at Holy Island on 8th	NH
Grey Wagtail	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Bullfinch	1 at Howick on 25th	P&AH
Greenfinch	1 at Longframlington on 30th	JMcC
Twite	6 at Long Nanny on 26th	PCA
Snow Bunting	1 at Holy Island on 27th	NH
Snow Bunting	7 at Bamburgh on 23rd	P&AH
Snow Bunting	1 at Long Nanny on 30th	PCA
Grey Partridge	4 at Buston Links on 26th	RP

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Phil & Marge Noble (PN&MN)
Richard Poyer (RP)

One legged Sanderling! - Phil Hanmer

What's Up on WhatsApp

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

Neil Hinchliff

Holy Island today, chasing a hoopoe which wasn't re-found again until this evening. meanwhile, goldcrest in the straight lonnen willows, plus three of, yet another, siberian stonechat...(had another sibe chat just 2 days ago in Amble...they're clearly like buses!!) 20:07

2

~Philip Hanmer

New - replacement - Tree-creeper box put up at Ingram today. Will send plans to Richard for the NNBC Website. Phil 15:13

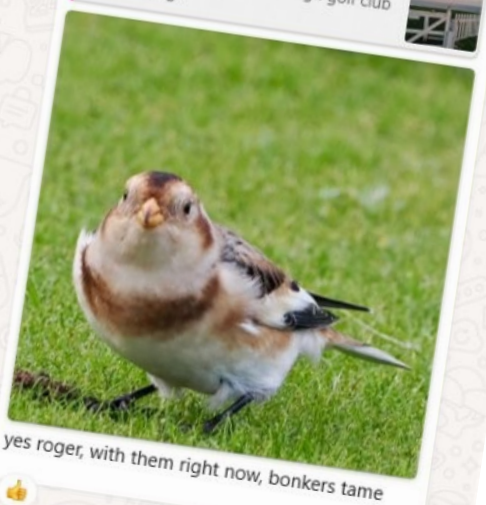
4

Did anyone get a decent photo of the Harrier on Sunday. If so would appreciate a copy for the newsletter 15:04 ✓

Neil Hinchliff

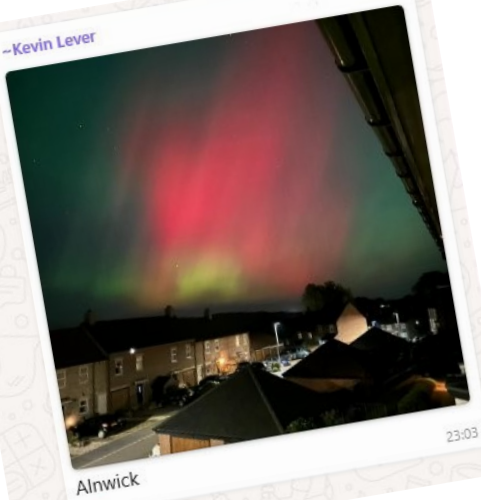
~roger hatcher

2 Snow bunting at Bamburgh golf club this morning.



yes roger, with them right now, bonkers tame 12:20

~Kevin Lever



Alnwick 23:03

❤️

Neil Hinchliff

big twitch on this afternoon... could be England's first ever recorded white-winged scoter 19:25

3

~Alison McCormick

Us too. Alison and Stewart. 13:58

The barn owl came back for a snooze this morning😊 13:59

2

Members' Contributions

Volunteers Needed on Lindisfarne Nature Reserve!

Like a fair number of other members of the Bird Club, I help out when I am able with events and practical projects on Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve.

However, as always, there is a lot of work needing to be done to promote and conserve this precious and internationally important habitat, and as always there are never enough volunteers!

With the support and agreement of the Reserve Manager Andy Denton ,I felt it may be helpful to outline a few of the tasks where Volunteers are always needed!

I have in previous Newsletters outlined the support needed during the shorebird breeding season as a result of which the Reserve was able to welcome a couple of new Volunteers from the Bird Club this last season- an enormous help as there were issues with the availability of temporary Seasonal Wardens this year.

As we know, the Reserve stretches from Cheswick Black Rocks in the North to Budle Bay. An enormous area which does not manage itself!

So where can Volunteers help out?

In Summer, Volunteers are needed on the shore during the breeding season from around the beginning of May until early September. In addition, this year the Reserve also celebrated its 60th Anniversary marked by the very successful Festival of Nature which took place on 26th August where Volunteers and Staff , ably supported by a guest appearance of Shaun the Sheep, helped out with Rock Pooling, Seal watching, and games and crafts at the Window on Wild Lindisfarne, to name but a few.

During the Autumn and Winter months, there is still plenty to do mainly with regard to Conservation and habitat management.

Cattle and Sheep, loaned by local farmers, arrive on the Island for conservation grazing to improve the sward for the myriad of important plants such as orchids and to keep down invasive plant species.

This latter is where Volunteers can help .Regular tasks at this time include physical removal of unwanted species such as Crocosmia as well as the removal of shrubs such as Willow and Hawthorn which are unwelcome within the dune system. Grass raking also takes place. As far as I am aware there are no means yet of eradicating the dreaded Pirri Pirri(Acaena) which is native to New Zealand, the burrs of which often adorn ones' clothes and socks after a session working on the Island!

Members' Contributions

The above mentioned tasks are quite physical but great fun, and an excellent work out interspersed with coffee and lunch breaks and plenty of chat!

If one doesn't fancy the physical work, there are plenty of opportunities throughout every year for public engagement, spreading information about the Reserve and getting across the messages to help reduce disturbance. You may be surprised how few locals realise it is a Nature Reserve!

There are regular events including the current Goose Festival, Dawn Choruses , Craft and Games events for children and families-and a more recent addition- the Welcome Wagon complete with video, leaflets and lots of information! It is rumoured to have a kettle but I've seen no evidence of this so far! This trailer shows up at various events and Volunteers are always needed to engage with the Public!

Throughout the year, regular Beach Cleans are organised

So, if you like getting your hands dirty and getting fit at the same time, or if your bag is more about chatting to people about the Reserve, there is something for you!

Please consider the above! If you are interested please contact the Reserve Manager Andy Denton on 01289 381470 or Mobile 07747 206226 or have a with me if you want more information!

Liz Harrison

Photos courtesy of Andy Denton

A Ringer's Year - October 2024

While last month's ringing at Howick ended on the excitement of migrants and rare birds this October has been a lot quieter. This has been due in part to the weather although the arboretum does seem to be short of some birds this year.

Things did start well on the 4/10/24 when we captured 45 birds (31 new & 14 retraps). The retraps were all local 'tits' while the new birds included Goldcrests with at least one being an adult; a late migrating male Blackcap and several members of the thrush family (that were probably all in-coming migrants): two Blackbirds, two Song Thrushes and a Redwing (see photo). We also caught a Nuthatch (see photo) and a new Yellow-browed Warbler (*highly frustrating as some special colour rings for a national Yellow-brow research project did not arrive in the post until the next day!*).

Ringing on the 18th only captured 19 birds (15 new & 4 retraps) although the retraps did include an adult Goldcrest first ringed on the 21/10/22; and last recaptured on the 23/10/23. The new birds started with a Treecreeper; five Blackbirds (probably migrants) and another late Blackcap. The 19th was similar with 24 birds (17 new & 7 retraps) including a Blackbird first ringed in 2024.

There were another five new Blackbirds a Goldcrest and a Nuthatch. On the 25th we captured 26 birds (15 new & 11 retraps) including two Goldcrests and a Blackbird first ringed in 2023. The new birds included three Bullfinches and Song Thrush. Finally, on the 26th we captured 15 birds (9 new & 6 retraps) including five Goldcrests.

After topping up some bird-feeders at Howick on the 3/10/24 I visited the main pool at Howick and fed the resident swans. This brief visit did not disappoint with the appearance of a Kingfisher, two Water Rail (one flying so close I could not focus a camera on it!) and at least ten Migrant Hawker Dragonflies (see photo.)!

This short report on Howick ringing enables me to add my annual report on this year's Barn Owl monitoring:

BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2024:

This study (of around 110 sites) in **North Northumberland** (North of the R. Wansbeck and outside the National Park) indicates that this was the best year for Barn Owl productivity since 2020. At 52% occupancy it was above the long-term average of 30%; although only 47 nests were successful at raising young (10 having failed).

The influence of the weather was clear with temperatures increasing in May, enough to kick start nesting. However, some of the failures can be put down to birds not having sufficient body weight to follow the process through to successfully raising a brood. There were no really early nests (*only one brood was ringed in May; on the 29th*) and most were ringed in July or even August. There were no second broods probably due to the unsettled weather making hunting difficult.

The average number of eggs laid per clutch was down and the maximum was 6 (7 in 2023). The average number of owlets fledged was 2.4 although at least two pairs raised 5.

A total of 138 owlets were ringed and mostly fledged. Although in two instances young owls left their nests early (possibly searching for food) and quickly perished. 24 new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 26 re-trapped/ controlled; including one coastal female that had been ringed near Warkworth in 2016 and is probably 10 yrs old. She has nested most years since; and doing so again this year she raised one young in August. Another controlled female was found nesting near Newton by the Sea (raising 3 young in June); she had first been located in a small 'tawny/duck box' at Low Newton in December 2022 and found to have come from Bacton in Suffolk!

Jackdaws continue to be a problem occupying owl nest sites. Kestrels only used two boxes (*and one sub-standard box close to a box that was used by an owl; so, we have now replaced this with a second owl box).* A Tawny Owl again occupied a Barn Owl box they first used in 2023 and a Mandarin duck took over another for the first time!

Successful Barn Owl nests were near: Wooler, Rock, Belford, Bamburgh, Seahouses, Embleton, Newton, Fallowdon, Berwick, Howick, Craster, Lesbury, Warkworth, Rothbury, Fontburn, Longframlington and Longhorsley.

Thanks are due to all those who have helped with this project; and those that have donated money for the making of boxes etc. .

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

Epilogue

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.