December Newsletter

Speaker Harold Dobson

Festive Greetings

and a Happy New Year

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Club Information

Chair
Neil Hinchliff

neilskye8@gmail.com

Secretary
Paul Ashdown
01665 576771

ashbauve.pm@gmail.com

Membership Secretary
Fiona Southern
01668 214481

jfs@robincottage.co.uk

Vice Chair
John Lumby

Treasurer
Alan Yeomans
07541 760731

a.yeomans720@btinternet.com

Committee Member
Liz Harrison

liz.a.harrison22@btinternet.com

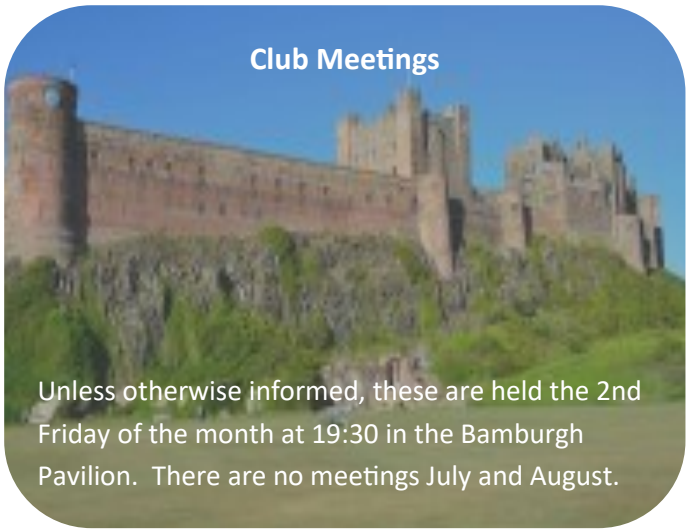
Committee Member
Alan Goodall

Honorary President
Graham Bell

Committee Member
Kevin Lever

Committee Member
Chris Cobb

Committee Member
Sarah Elder



"If birds can glide for long periods of time, then why can't I?"

Orville Wright

Bird Recorder
Paul Armstrong

nnbcrecords@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor
John McCutcheon

john@waterstar.uk

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

Refreshment Helpers Urgently Needed Please!

The Refreshments Leaders feel we need to extend our pool of members who are happy to lend a hand on a Club night. We have lost some from our list and as always, the more people who volunteer, the fewer times they will each be called upon! At the moment the refreshment team is all women for some odd reason, but it would be great if some men would volunteer as there is some lifting involved and two of us also find it impossible to reach up and pull down the shutter, being vertically as well as arthritically challenged!

Currently we are okay for Team leaders, those being Rosemary Bell, Margaret, Martine and me. Leaders are responsible for replenishing the refreshments box each month, dealing with the automatic kettle and wrestling with the demon dishwasher.

Helpers are only asked to assist with dispensing drinks and biscuits, taking refreshments to the Speaker and Chair, collecting mugs before the second half of the talk and maybe a bit of washing up.

Please do volunteer! No previous experience is necessary as full training will be given!!

I know members are appreciative of those who give their time to help, but there could be times when none of the depleted current team is available and so unfortunately there may be instances when no refreshments are available.

Thank you - I shall look forward to a rush of new volunteers of both genders wishing to help out!

Liz

Upcoming Field Trips

Wednesday 1st Jan 2025
New Years Day Watching
Seahouses Area Leader: John Lumby
Meet as usual at the car park on the right as you enter High Newton by the Sea; need to start early at 8:15 am, so that we are clear of Bamburgh before it gets crowded!
Hope we have a good tally and that we can get into the Castle Inn as the light fails.

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 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**

Friday 14th Feb at 19:30
The BTO and BTO Surveys with **Tom and Muriel Cadwallander**

See web site for details of other Meetings

Noticeboard

Thank You...

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the club for its very generous gift when I stood down from the Chairmanship. I intend to buy a piece of Darren Woodhead's work. Also many thanks for Sue's fantastic bouquet. Taking over from Graham Bell was daunting but, with a great group of committee members and other active helpers, the years have flown by.

My very best wishes to the club for many more enjoyable years.

Richard Poyer

Graham Bell Trophy

Good luck to all entries in our photo competition on Friday 13th....

Classic Books for Sale - On sale, a small donation will be made to club funds

Contact John Lumby, 01665 720654 or at North Sunderland, Seahouses, Northumberland, NE68 7WG.

Baimer, Gillings etc, Bird Atlas 2007-11, 1st edition, 2013, boards (+ prof: Fred Cooke Letter) 720 pages, fine condition £50

Jay, Noble etc, Victorian Naturalist (Beatrix Potter Drawings) 1st ed, 1992, dw, fine condition £30

Lane The Magic years of Beatrix Potter 1st ed, 1980, soft covers, fine condition £5

Ridgely,Gwynne Guide to the Birds of Panama (+ Costa Rica, Nicaragua) 1st ed, 1989, dw, fine condition £20

Clarke Montagu's Harrier 1996 1st edition, dust wrapper, very fine condition £30

Wernham, Toms, etc The Migration Atlas (Movements of birds of B & I) 1st ed, 2002 884 pages, dw, very good condition £40

Scott & Fisher A Thousand Geese 1st ed, 1953 dw, fine condition £15

Flint,Boehme,Kostin,Kuznetsov Field Guide Birds of the USSR 1st ed, 1984, dw, fine condition £15

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) £60

Speaker's Presentation

Return of the Red Kite with Harold Dobson

This month's talk at The Pavilion told the tale of the return of Red Kites to the North East. Harold Dobson, renowned ambassador for and friend of Red Kites, took us through the history of how the project in the Derwent valley brought these magnificent birds back to our corner of England. Appropriately, members at the meeting reported recent sightings of kites in North Northumberland, giving us hope that the frustratingly slow progress of the birds into our locality might finally overcome what we all acknowledge as the hostility of the shooting community. The images Harold shared of these spectacular birds show that they would be a fantastic addition to our countryside, and their primary role as a scavenger should make them a friend to all.

Harold explained that the Old English word for kite was "glede" (literally "glider" from "glidan" to glide). Which of us hasn't marvelled at the twisting, soaring flight of kites, now such a common sight as you travel along motorways in most of the rest of England. Historically these were birds of rubbish heaps and offal strewn urban streets, but as towns and cities were cleaned up, they were forced back into the countryside where they, like all other raptors, fell fowl of gamekeepers. Harold quoted parish records from Corbridge in the 1700s, reporting over 160 killed, and by the 1990s they were reduced to a tiny relic population in West Wales. Their comeback is one of the great stories of re-introductions in the UK.

Although the "breakthrough" for red Kites was the introduction project in the Chilterns, Harold's story focused on the "Northern Kites Project" in the Derwent Valley which started in 2004. Chicks from larger broods in the Chilterns were carefully transported north and acclimatised at Gibside, the National Trust estate. Regular releases built up a local population of about 80 kites in five years, and breeding swiftly followed. The project was supported by a careful publicity campaign to encourage local communities to be proud and protective of their special birds. Primary Schools adopted the young birds, bus routes were renamed after them and Harold's organisation, the "Friends of the Red Kites" established in 2009.

Parallel to this, serious tracking and monitoring of the new population was carried out. Nestlings were ringed and wing-tagged by licensed ornithologists, and nest sites and winter roosts tracked down and monitored.

Speaker's Presentation

Work like this gives us a clear picture of the lifestyle of Derwent Kites. After spending most of the winter in communal roosts they pair up in February, laying eggs around April, with the young birds fledging in June. Harold explained that the monitoring work undertaken had blown a hole in the accepted wisdom that Kites mate for life. One female bird had attempted breeding with three different partners across England and Wales, probably just "gledding about"!

Questions after Harold's talks aired our frustration that these birds are not yet fully established here despite established populations in both the Derwent Valley and Dumfries and Galloway. Harold reported that monitored birds had mysteriously disappeared once they moved into areas managed for shooting, but proof is difficult to find.

Nevertheless, there is an increasing trickle of sightings from members, and perhaps the recent transfer of the Rothbury Estate from aristocratic shooting-owners to the Wildlife Trusts will tip the balance in their favour. (I read that the Trust have already said that it would be "inappropriate" to have shooting on their land – hooray!)

So, hopefully our skies will soon see more of these magnificent birds. A big thank you to Harold and all his colleagues for helping them on their journey.

Field Trip Report

Low Newton led by Paul Ashdown and Martine Delbauve, 21st November 2024

The Club's November Field Meeting was to a very cold and snow-covered Low Newton. A small group of our hardiest birders set out at 9 o'clock after braving some interestingly icy roads. The snow flurry which hit the coastal strip seemed to have surprised the gritters as well as everyone else!

Despite the temperature, the light and visibility were perfect, and as we collected together by "The Tin Church" we saw Greylags overhead, and heard the wonderful cawing of the large rookery in High Newton. But after that, things were a bit slow-going to start with. The walk through the trees and scrub onto the point was almost empty and silent, the birds laying low in the cold, so not many of the passerines we had counted on. We did get a kestrel to brighten things up, but we shouldn't have worried.

As we climbed up to the top of the heugh the open field towards the point was dotted with little brown specs which took to the air in swirling, gently peeping clouds. A flock of Golden Plovers, catching the winter sun as they turned made the early start worthwhile.

We made our way down the ridge to the coast and scopes were trained on the sea. The wind made conditions difficult, but we did start picking up interesting birds. Alongside stalwarts like Eider, Cormorant and Gulls, we had a lovely view of a Great Northern Diver flying over the waves, and picked out Common Scoter, Goldeneye and Long-tailed Duck.

Those of us without scopes took the detour to the bluff over Football Hole and managed to collect a good list of the predictable waders, and when we got back to Neil, still stuck to his scope, he told us to look out for Little Auk which he had caught working their way north in small groups. To start with, we all found them difficult to spot with just binoculars, but as our eyes got in, we saw more and more. By the end of the day, we had all had really good sightings of these amazing little birds, some of them really close to shore in Embleton Bay, bobbing about taking a break from their trip back north.

Working our way around the point we were treated to a stooping Peregrine, and then, in one of the sheltered little coves as you get close to the village, suddenly found all the

passerines that had been hiding from us: Robin, Song Thrush, Rock & Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Pied Wagtail and Starling. The day's list was beginning to build…

The view into the rocks below Low Newton Square is always interesting, and gave us a few more to add like Wigeon and Sanderling. Then we headed behind the buildings to the scrape. In the icy weather we didn't expect to see too much on the frozen pond, but in fact we had one of the highlights of the day as there were nearly 50 Whooper Swans resting in the middle where the water wasn't quite solid. The view was finished off as three Roe Deer walked across the field behind them – pure magic.

Our small group was able to nestle in the National Trust hide for lunch. We had the place to ourselves and thawed out a little, before heading along the dunes to the burn where it enters the bay. The height of the dunes gives you really good sea-watching, and the waters were calmer in the bay, making observation easier. The highlight here was a Red-necked Grebe. By the time we got down to the river bank, we were all looking for common birds like Reed Bunting still missing from our list, but instead, we were treated to a pair of Jack Snipe, a lovely flock of Twite, a Greenfinch and even a solitary Snow Bunting.

The walk back along the beach gave us our best views of Little Auk, and we made our last stop for a serious scan of the waders on the rocks and seaweed. We found a Purple Sandpiper as a reward, and spent a good 20 minutes discussing three mystery waders, which finally turned out to be Dunlin! Then back up the hill to the cars with a few final additions like Magpie and Redwing, to give us a grand total of 70 birds on our list. The birds we *didn't* see is also an interesting list. No Blue Tit, Reed Bunting, Chaffinch or Yellowhammer, all normally reliable sightings here.

The "meat" of the list was caught out to sea, where scopes were able to pick out things like Razorbill, Guillemot and Puffin, while Gannet, Shag and Shelduck all flew past. Low Newton is always a fantastic walk, and today in the brilliant sunshine, with great views and excellent company, we all had a great time.

As our Chair said to me beforehand, "A great introduction to winter birding".

Field Trip Report

Species List:

Rook
Blackbird
Greylag Goose
Starling
Wood pigeon
Herring Gull
Carrion Crow
Dunnock
Wren
Kestrel
Black-headed Gull
Cormorant
Golden Plover
Eider
Mallard
Oystercatcher
Redshank
Curlew
Gannet
Grey Plover
Turnstone
Bar-tailed Godwit
Ringed Plover
Goldeneye
Great Black-backed Gull
Little Auk
Common Gull
Common Scoter

Widgeon
Peregrine Falcon
Grey Heron
Shelduck
Great Northern Diver
Pied Wagtail
Skylark
Meadow Pipit
Stonechat
Robin
Rock Pipit
Song Thrush
Red-throated Diver
Dunlin
Sanderling
House Sparrow
Lapwing
Linnet
Whooper Swan
Goldfinch
Great Tit
Teal
Moorhen
Pheasant
Shag
Long-tailed Duck
Red-necked Grebe
Guillemot
Razorbill

Buzzard
Mistle Thrush
Little Grebe
Jack Snipe
Twite
Greenfinch
Goosander
Purple Sandpiper
Jackdaw
Redwing
Magpie
Puffin
Snow Bunting

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for November...

Whooper Swan	20 at Low Newton Scrape on 30th	DG&RB
	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
	18 at Warkworth on 13th	PCA
Long-tailed Duck	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Water Rail	2 at Howick Pool on 3rd and 12th and 1 on 30th	P&AH
Red-necked Grebe	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Great Crested Grebe	6 at Alnmouth Bay on 14th	RP
Black-necked Grebe	1 at Stag Rocks on 10th	NH
Grey Plover	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
	1 at Seahouses on 20th	PCA
Purple Sandpiper	140 at Bamburgh on 30th	DG&RB
	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
	37 at Birling Carrs on 14th	RP
Woodcock	1 at Lemmington Bank Wood on 30th	P&AH
Jack Snipe	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Little Auk	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Black Guillemot	2 at Stag Rocks on 10th	NH
Puffin	1 at Alnmouth Bay on 14th	RP
Red-throated Diver	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
	2 at Howick Burn mouth on 12th	P&AH
	1 at Bamburgh on 22nd and 28th	PCA
	7 at Alnmouth Bay on 14th	RP
Black-throated Diver	2 at Alnmouth Bay on 14th	RP
Great Northern Diver	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Great White Egret	1 at Hedgeley on 15th	BRW
Sparrowhawk	1 at Yearle on 20th	DG&RB
	1 at Chathill on 28th	PCA
Barn Owl	1 at Ancroft on 27th	DG&RB
Kingfisher	1 at Howick Pool on 12th, 21st and 30th	P&AH
Peregrine	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Jay	2 at Yearle on 16th	DG&RB
	1 at Howick pool on 12th	P&AH
Raven	1 at Ford Moss on 9th	PCA
	2 at Bamburgh on 10th	PCA
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 at Howick on 3rd	P&AH
Bullfinch	1 at Chathill on 3rd	PCA
	1 at Ford Moss on 9th	PCA
Greenfinch	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
Twite	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC
	60+ at Long Nanny on 14th. 76 on 21st	PCA
	c60 at Long Nanny on 23rd, 27th and 29th	PCA
Redpoll	12 at Branton on 24th	P&AH
	15 at Throat Wood, Longframlington on 15th	Pha
Snow Bunting	At Low Newton on 21st	NNBC

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB)
Phil Hanmer (PHa)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Richard Poyer (RP)
Barry Whitehead (BRW)
NNBC Field Trip (NNBC)

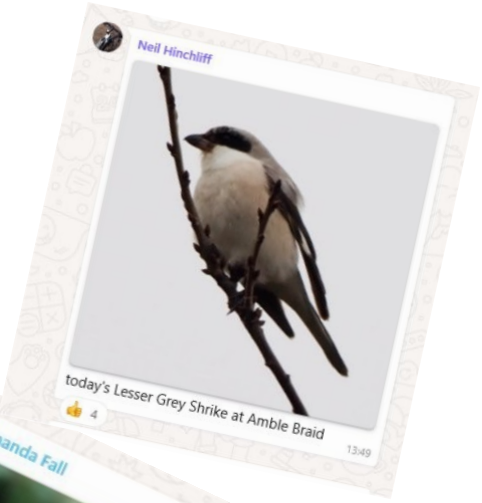
Whooper Swans over Howick Cricket Fields - Phil Hanmer

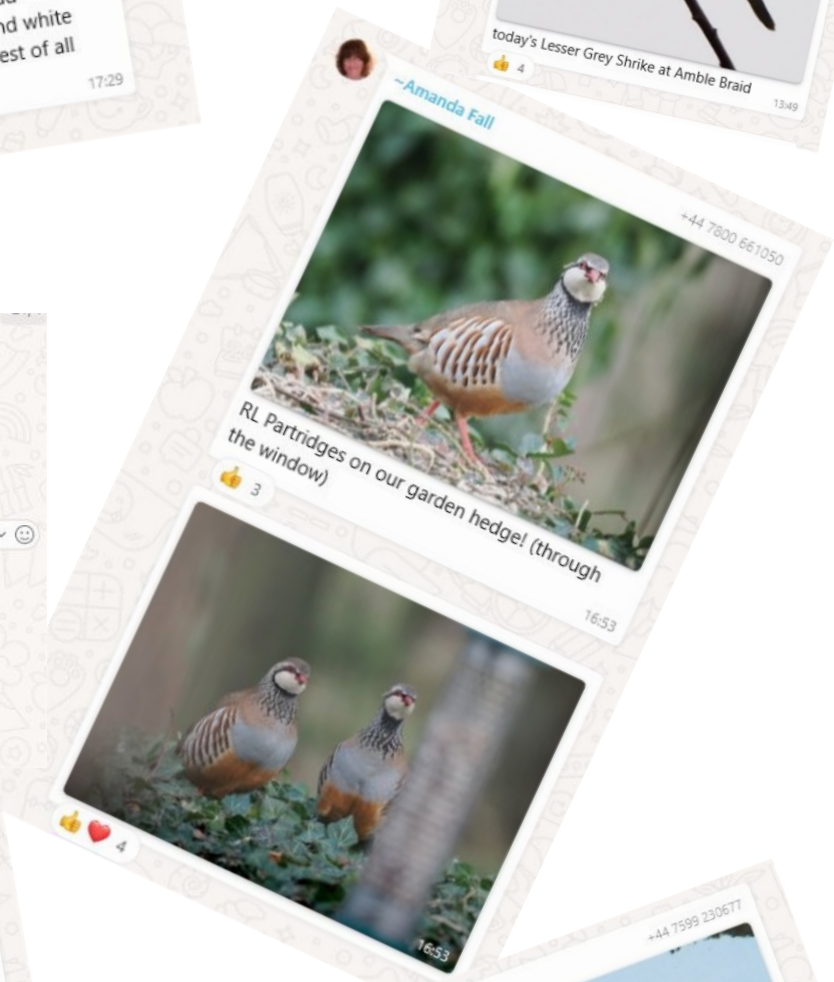
A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

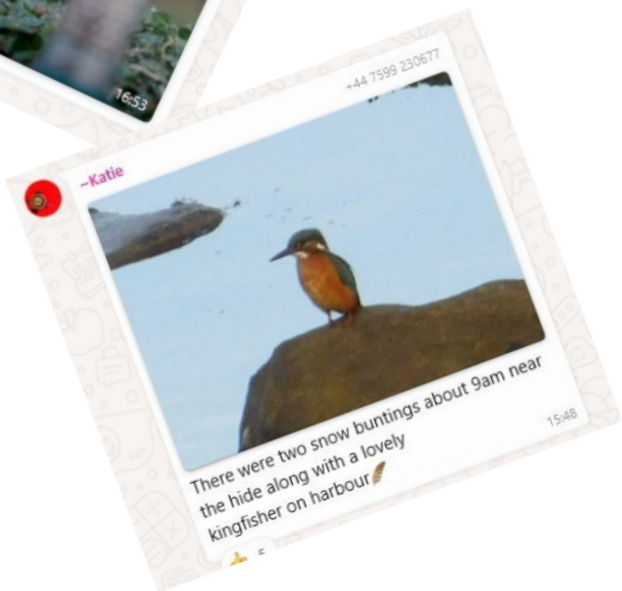
Membership of NNBC / RSPB / WWT makes a great Christmas Present
Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

What's Up on WhatsApp

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







Members' Contributions

Getting the best out of Boulmer Shorebirds - Colin Bradshaw

I have been photographing birds and living within a stone's throw of the Northumbrian coast for nearly 40 years, yet, in all that time, I had not got a decent photo of either Knot or Grey Plover in winter dress. Sure, I had good shots of breeding birds from Alaska but I could hardly pass those off as being local!

I had looked enviously at the photos posted by people like Chris Barlow and wondered what I was doing wrong. During the winter of 2020, with the enforced travel constraints of Covid, I decided to sort it.

Most of Chris's good shots had been taken at Boulmer and, during that autumn, I had been impressed by the number of waders present there, with the Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover. I visited on several occasions later in the year at various states of the tide and eventually worked out how I thought I might get the best opportunities for both Grey Plover and Knot – and Bar-tailed Godwit as well.

The first day I executed my plan I actually scored with all my target species and some more. …… now I am going to pass on those tips to you for free (What a great guy I am….)

Red Knot - Seaton Point

Bar Tailed Godwit - Seaton

Firstly, you need a sunny day from November to March with a big tide (5 metres plus) and it needs to be high tide mid to late afternoon otherwise the light is rancid. It's also better if it's during the week so there are fewer dog-walkers around. Go to Seaton Point about 3 hrs before high tide with a cushion, a flask of good coffee (Baristocracy Coffee is my personal favourite) some sandwiches and perhaps even a good book. Walk down the path onto the beach and start heading north until the shoreline swings slightly west of north. It is not far around the point, about where the second last path through the caravan park comes onto the beach. There is also a rocky scar going out into the sea there. Pushed hard against the sand cliff in the marram grass is a huge, old, washed-up wooden trunk or pile [it looks like it's from an old pier I would guess – whatever it is it's big enough to sit comfortably on. Put your cushion on this, set your packed lunch out, get your camera and tripod ready (I didn't mention a tripod but you should have one).

You are going to be there for 3 hours and when the birds are close you don't want to be moving your camera much – 3 hours of hand holding is too much for Charles Atlas let alone me. Then sit back on your comfortable cushion, enjoy the view and wait.

Grey Plover - Seaton Point

The birds initially gather on the rocky point over 50 yards out to sea but as the tide comes in this area gets covered and the birds land on the beach, just north of where you are sitting with reasonably good light. Initially they are wary but eventually they settle down. Of course you need to wear inconspicuous clothes, keep quiet and relatively still. Now I don't mean stay like a statue as I was able to drink and eat something without disturbing them but if your birding buddy is louder than Harry Secombe or dresses like your average American golfer, I would leave him behind.

It actually works quite well if there are one or two people walking the beach as the birds get disturbed and you can get flight shots as well but they seem to like coming back to this place. You need a lens equivalent to 500-600 – so a 400 with a 1.3 crop sensor would work well. And don't forget the tripod, cushion or Baristocracy Coffee.

Have a go you won't regret it….

Oyster Catcher - Seaton Point

A Ringer's Year - November 2024

This year we managed to squeeze in one more visit to Howick Ringing Station on the 3/11/24 when we captured 52 birds (27 new & 25 retraps). The retraps included two Treecreepers, one an adult the other a juvenile (flying together so probably an adult and its offspring). Several Long Tailed Tits who continued to 'twitter' to each other while in their temporary captivity see photo and a female Bullfinch first ringed as an adult in 2022. The new birds included a Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*); a very late in the year

catch of this rare migrant; which I was able to colour ring as part of a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) National project. This ostensibly Asian passerine, breeding in the Siberian Taiga forests and normally wintering in Southeast Asia, is being increasingly seen in Britain as individuals are apparently migrating to Africa. If you see a Yellow-brow with colour rings please let me (or the BTO) know about it. I feel it worth noting that we had two overseas research students ringing with us on this morning; one from the Philippines who I think must take the record of the person who has had to travel the furthest to ring at Howick!

Over the winter the BTO encourages us to participate in a Winter Ringing Project which is often done in gardens (and incidentally being analyzed by my son Hugh, who works at the BTO). Having done a couple of sessions my simply observation so far is that the proportion of adults (as opposed to juveniles of the year) is high this year; notably so in the case of 'tits' rather suggesting they did not have a very successful breeding season. Also interesting was that on the second session there were rather a lot of Robins around, including 3 adult retraps and 2 juveniles.

My compatriot Hilary also did some ringing this month at a woodland site near Longframlington where

she captured some of my favourite birds: Marsh Tits. This scarce tit is notable for its habit of caching food. It's then able to remember where it's stored *Beech Mast or Black Sunflower seeds for example* and recover them in bad weather. This is not a behavior seen in Blue Tits or Great Tits. She also captured a very personable Nuthatch.

The weather has stopped us doing much with Barn Owls this month but before things took a negative turn, we were able to visit RAF Boulmer for the second time this year. Back in June we rediscovered a long neglected Barn Owl box which despite years of debris held four young owls, and this month we found another box in an even worse condition. We also located two Barn Owls that are almost certainly the parents of the young owls ringed back in June. One was a new female, probably about four years old and the other a retrapped male [GV97838] that had been ringed near Bilton on the old railway line five years ago.

This male owl has been christened 'Bob' by the RAF and adopted as the new mascot of 144 Signals Squadron. Needless to say, we have done a major clean-out of these owls living quarters - increasing the amount of nest box space considerably!

We have also managed, dodging the rain, to put up two new Barn Owl boxes; one in a tree near Longhorsley that replaces a box that was coming apart in the weather, and another in a quiet stable.

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

Epilogue

Caught It!

Male Goosander eating a Perch at Branton Ponds on Sunday 24th November…

Phil Hanmer

Bit Big This!

Gulp!

In association with Ordnance Survey os.uk/osm

NORTHUMBERLAND

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 2 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

FENHAM-LE-MOOR

Vast extent of mudflats, saltmarsh and hedgerows

Redshank

PRACTICAL INFO
POSTCODE: NE70 7PN
GRID REF: NU 095 393
MAPS: OS Explorer 340, OS Landranger 75
PARKING: Free parking for two cars at the end of the road by the hide
TERRAIN: Very flat along the tarmac road so it is suitable for wheelchairs
ACCESSIBILITY: Open all year round. Please ensure that your vehicle is not blocking any of the farm gates
FACILITIES: None. Belford has cafés, toilets and pubs

enham Flats is one of the

The hide at

Check out Steve Newman's latest article in Birdwatching Magazine and on our website (under Bird Watching Places). With Bauer Media's permission.

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.