May Newsletter

Speaker Chris Redfern

Dipper—Harthope Valley—Margaret Goodall

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

Sometimes Bird Watching is a bit of a climb

Upcoming Field Trips

Sunday 11th May 2025 at 05:15
Dawn Chorus, Ford & Etal - Details next page

Saturday 24th May 2025 at 10:00
St Abbs - Details next page

Thursday 5th June 2025
Upper Teesdale - 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. Give your emergency contact phone number to leader at start of trip. Please car share if you can. Thank You.

Upcoming Meetings

Friday 9th May at 19:30
South East Australia & The Outback with **John Lumby**

Friday 13th June at 19:30
Balkan Birding with **Dr Colin Bradshaw**

New members welcome at meetings

See web site for details of other Meetings

Field Trip - Sunday 11th May 2025
Annual Dawn Chorus visit to Ford & Etal

Once again, James and Harriet Joicey have offered to hold another Dawn Chorus outing. I'm sure regular club attendees will be looking forward to this event, but for those of you who have yet to experience the dawn chorus, I can promise you something very special that will remain with you forever.

The plan this year is for all to meet at Tindal House Farm (NT 923 412 & W3W windmills.school.motivate) at 05:15.

This is a section of the Ford & Etal Estate that hasn't been visited by the club for a few years, yet will perfectly express our morning of birdsong.

Strong footwear is recommended, plus there may be one or two undulations - suggesting perhaps walking poles for those who normally use them. Breakfast will be served afterwards at Etal Manor, where Harriet will be encouraging a donation towards her current local charity.

Following 2024's bumper turn-out, James and Harriet would like the club to restrict attendees to 20, so those wishing to attend will be able to add their names to a list which will be alongside Fiona's membership desk this coming Friday at our monthly indoor meeting.

Any slots remaining may be claimed by signing up personally at Friday's meeting (9th May). Please note that only those names on the list may attend.

Neil Hinchliff

Field Trip - Saturday 24th May 2025
St Abbs Head

Meet at the National Nature Reserve (National Trust for Scotland) Car Park (O.S. NT913674) about a mile north of Coldingham on the minor B6438 to St Abbs. Meet time is 10:00.

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

There is a £5 car parking charge for non-National Trust/NTS members, but access to the Reserve and Centre is free. The machine does not always work for National Trust members, but displaying your membership card will suffice.

Leaders: Chris Cobb and Neil Hinchliff

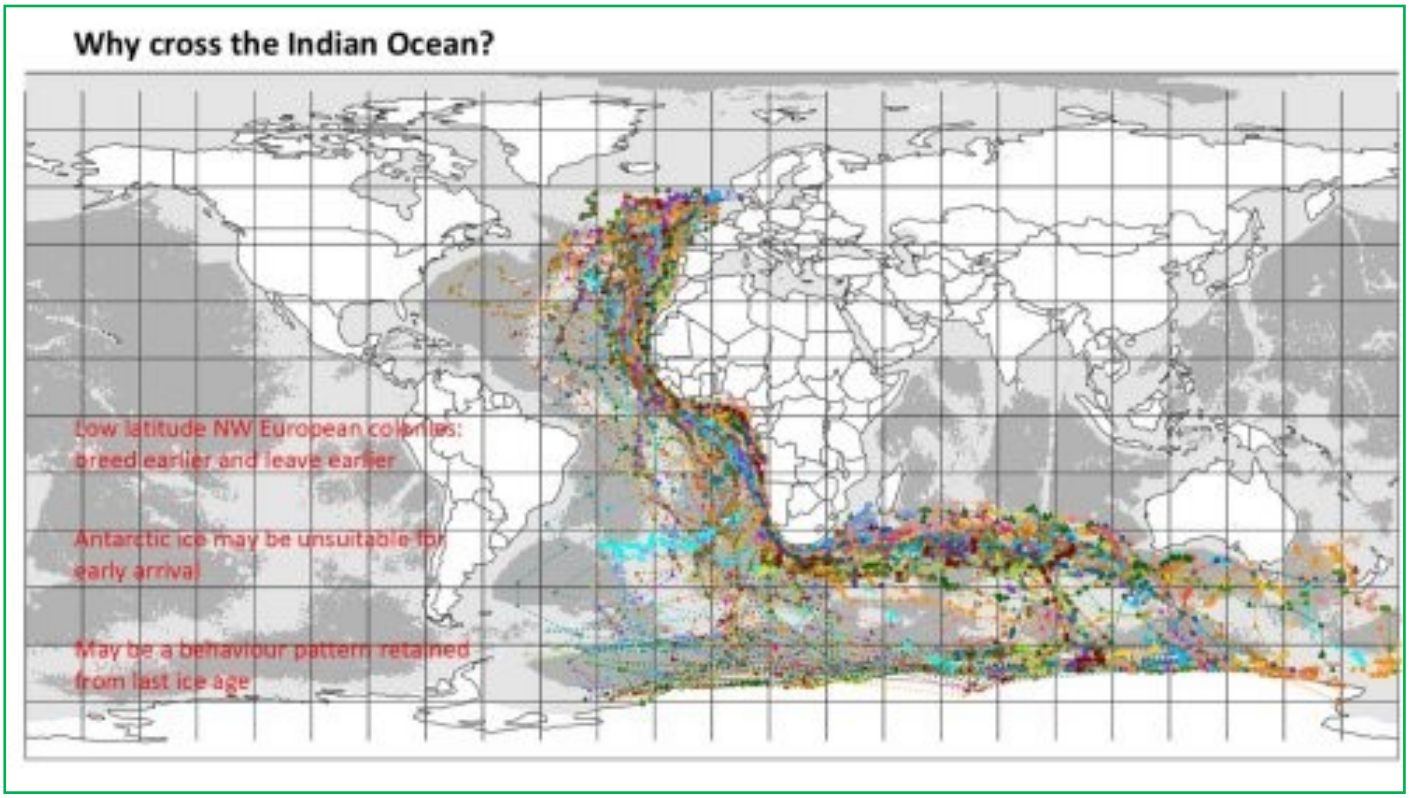
"Hear how the birds, on every blooming spray,
With joyous music wake the dawning day"
Alexander Pope

Speaker's Presentation

Chris Redfern - To Antarctica and Back with Arctic Terns

For our April talk this year the club welcomed back Chris Redfern, to update us on his remarkable work focused on the migration of Arctic Terns breeding on the Farne Islands. The subject is close to the heart for many of us, and gave us a packed Pavilion. Surely, the experience of visiting the Farnes and being mobbed by Terns is one of our collective foundations as North Northumberland birders. I first visited while on holiday from Kent when I was 12 or 13, and still remember the amazing feeling of a tern sitting on my head while the noise and smell of the colony overwhelmed my senses. To most of us at the talk, the Farnes terns are more than "just" a stunning seabird colony: they are part of what makes us birders, often part of the reason we have chosen to live in Northumberland.

To this powerful emotional context Chris added hard science, which helped him tell a story which can only leave you even more awed by the birds he studies. He combines the use of amazing modern technology with the careful, more traditional skills and fieldcraft of the ringer, to track the journeys of our Terns, flying not only all the way south to the Antarctic, but also half-way across the Southern Indian Ocean on their epic annual round trip. With this talk, Chris was also able to share analysis of the data captured on his mini-recorders, which answered some of the questions which have intrigued researchers for years.



So, for example, do the paired terns migrate together or do they only link up for breeding on the Farnes? Answer: the tracking data shows they often have hugely different routes south, travelling independently, but still - more often than not - find their established mate each year at the end of their 8000 mile journey! Not all the questions have such clear-cut answers. How do they feed in Antarctica and on their journeys? We know they feast on small fish during the breeding season, but with clever analysis of the molecules in their feathers, Chris was able to show that the birds had been eating crustaceans at the time they moulted in Antarctica. This, together with comparison of their locations, and the likely location of massive shoals of krill close to the Antarctic ice, indicate a very strong likelihood that krill is their key food in the south. Chris linked all of this to the amusing but useful field mark of Arctic Terns being vertically challenged. They have the shortest legs in relation to their bodies of any tern, much

shorter than both Common Terns in the Northern Hemisphere and Antarctic Terns in the Southern, which otherwise can look very similar. Legs aren't covered with insulating feathers and so get cold quicker than the rest of the body. If you are spending a long time on sea-ice, short legs help to reduce heat loss and so become an evolutionary advantage, not needed by the other species.

Chris's analysis also highlights key issues for the future of Arctic Terns on the Farnes and everywhere. When the National Trust had to close the Farnes to the public during covid, and then again because of Avian Influenza, numbers of breeding terns crashed. At the low point, there were only ten pairs breeding on Inner Farne. Chris showed that this is likely to be because the lack of visitors allowed predatory gulls to dominate the islands, forcing terns to abandon open and vulnerable sites. The return of visitors has begun to change things, as nest sites close to paths and human activity become once again the best way to protect eggs and chicks.

More worrying, Chris also showed the importance Antarctic Sea ice and the krill associated with it to Arctic Tern ecology. When we hear about massive reductions in sea ice and industrial fishing for krill in the southern seas, we should also remember that though these are far, far away, they will have a direct impact on birds breeding on the Farnes. Although they are very much a local bird, Arctic Terns are also the perfect example of the interconnectedness of our planet. To protect them, looking after the Farnes will not be enough, we have to protect the whole planet.

Paul Ashdown

Field Trip Report

Harthope Valley – 24 April 2025 - Led by Liz Harrison and Neil Hinchliff

Not to be deterred by reports of potholes on the road, rough terrain, ticks and Adders, 21 members (including one prospective member) joined Neil and Liz at the Hawsen Burn in the Harthope Valley.

Neil led off with Liz, (nursing a dodgy knee) as back marker.

It was agreed we would survey the pasture where Ring Ouzels are usually seen when they first arrive, and if not present would approach on the Broadstruther path to search further up the Valley. Neil set off like a mountain goat up a steep path from the car park with everyone following on huffing and puffing. No casualties or heart attacks thank goodness.

After a fruitless search apart from a Stonechat, Red Grouse and numerous Meadow Pipits we went to plan B, on the rough track towards Broadstruther, serenaded en route by Cuckoo, Mistle Thrush, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. A brief stop in the woodland at the start of the path produced Redpoll and Chaffinch.

Further on, and after considerable searching, a pair of keen eyes spotted our target! A fine male Ring Ouzel which posed for keen photographers to take some excellent shots before heading off down. Picked up again a little further down the valley after one false identification of Cotton Grass!

Returning to the Harthope Valley we had lunch before heading up along the Valley Floor towards Langleeford Hope. En route, some time was spent at the bridge to the farm where a pair of Dippers were busily searching for food for their young. Grey and Pied Wagtails with Barn Swallows and House Martens above.

Heading up the valley, Redstart was heard by Winnie but not seen.

Half way up the valley half the party decided to return, while Neil and a few others continued and were rewarded with good sightings of Redpoll and Whinchat. Unusually, no Common Sandpiper was seen.

The returning party added Great Spotted Woodpecker and Grey Heron, again spending time admiring the pair of busy Dippers on the Burn.

As well as all the bird species seen, the group also reported 1 Adder, 2 Slowworms and 1 Common Lizard.

Green Tiger Beetle and Oil Beetle. Oil Beetles are uncommon and are nest parasites of Mining Bees. When threatened they release an oily substance from their leg joints which can cause irritation so they are best observed at a distance! Hopefully Mora who was cajoled into to picking it up so it could be photographed has not suffered any skin irritation as a result of her bravery!

Oil Beetles are of conservation concern and more can be found at: www.buglife.org.uk

48 bird species seen. Full list below.

Thanks to Neil, Brian, Margaret and Jon for photos

Liz Harrison

Species seen:

Barn Swallow	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Long-tailed Tit
Carrion Crow	Eurasian Siskin	Mallard
Coal Tit	Eurasian Skylark	Meadow Pipit
Common Buzzard	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Mistle Thrush
Common Chaffinch	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Northern Wheatear
Common Chiffchaff	Eurasian Treecreeper	Pied Wagtail/White Wagtail
Common Cuckoo	Eurasian Wren	Red Grouse/Willow Grouse
Common Kestrel	European Goldfinch	Red-legged Partridge
Common Magpie	European Greenfinch	Redpoll
Common Pheasant	European Robin	**Ring Ouzel**
Common Woodpigeon	European Stonechat	Song Thrush
Eurasian Blackbird	Goldcrest	Tree Pipit
Eurasian Blue Tit	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Western House Martin
Eurasian Bullfinch	Great Tit	Whinchat
Eurasian Curlew	Grey Heron	White-throated Dipper
Eurasian Nuthatch	Grey Wagtail	Willow Warbler

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for April 2025...

Brent Goose	2 at Beal on 18th	AJM
Ruddy Shelduck	1 at Long Nanny on 11th	GL
	1 at Tughall Links Pond on 14th	PCA
Garganey	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	JHB
	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	NH
Red-crested Pochard	1 at Budle Bay on 28th	NH
Ring-necked Duck	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	JHB
	1 at Hedgeley on 18th and 21st	PCA
Scaup	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	JHB
	1 at Hedgeley on 8th	JMcC
Cuckoo	1 at Harthope Valley on 21st	DR
	1 at Routin Lynn on 24th	NH
	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	1 at Cartington on 16th	P&AH
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	JHB
	2 at Hedgeley on 8th	JMcC
	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	NH
	1 at Hedgeley on 12th	PCA
Whimbrel	1 at Longhoughton on 20th	NH
Snipe	1 at Ford Moss on 20th	SV&AJM
Greenshank	1 at River Tweed on 19th	NH
Sandwich Tern	1 at Warkworth on 2nd	JHB
Osprey	1 at Norham on 14th	DR
	1 at River Tweed on 17th	NH
Barn owl	1 at Yearle on 11th	AJM
	1 at Ellingham on 10th	PCA
Tawny Owl	4 in Breamish Valley on 10th	P&AH
Raven	2 at Ford Moss on 20th	P&AH
	1 at Budle Bay on 29th	PCA
Marsh Tit	1 at Pauperhaugh on 20th and 23rd	JMcC
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Football Hole on 23rd	PCA
	1 at Long Nanny on 15th and 19th	PCA
	1 at Ford Moss on 20th	SV&AJM
Garden Warbler	1 at Ford Moss on 25th	JHB
	1 at Routin Lynn on 24th	NH
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Chathill on 23rd	PCA
Nuthatch	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	3 at Howick pool on 8th	P&AH
Treecreeper	1 at Branton on 8th	JMcC
	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
Ring Ouzel	1 at Harthope Vally on 9th	NH
	2 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	1 at Hawsen Burn on 12th	P&AH

Bird Sighting Records

Redstart	1 at Harwood Forest on 17th	JMcC
	2 at Ford Moss on 20th	P&AH
	1 at Blueburn on 16th	P&AH
Whinchat	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
Wheatear	1 at Holy Island on 13th	NH
Dipper	1 at Wooler Water on 27th	AJM
	1 at Pauperhaugh on 30th	JMcC
	4 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	1 at Hawsen Burn on 12th	P&AH
White Wagtail	1 at Warkworth on 17th	JHB
Tree Pipit	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	2 at Ford Moss on 20th	P&AH
Bullfinch	2 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	1 at Branton on 18th	PCA
Greenfinch	1 at Longframlington on 8th and 4 on 13th	JMcC
	1 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	1 at Fenwick Granary on 20th	PCA
Redpoll	4 at Harthope Valley on 24th	NNBC
	9 at Newham Bog on 7th	PCA

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Jon Bowen (JHB)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
Gary Lawrence (GL)
Alison McCormick (AJM)
Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
David Richens (DR)
NNBC Field Trip (NNBC)

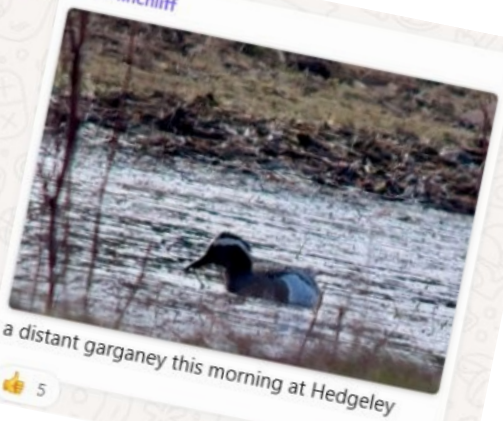
What's Up on WhatsApp

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

~Philip Hammer
Dunstanburgh Castle cliffs today: 30 Razorbills; 200 pairs of Kittiwakes approx. One Greylag goose nesting on cliff edge! Phil & Alison 14:20

Razorbills at Dunstanburgh Castle.
Phil & Alison 14:20

Neil Hinchliff

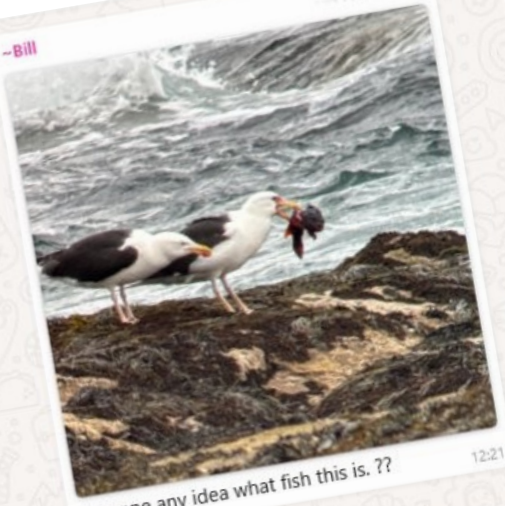


a distant garganey this morning at Hedgeley
5
20:28

~Jon B

One of 5 Yellow Wagtails at East Chev this afternoon. 3 Wheatear also in the same field
8
17:37

~Bill



Any one any idea what fish this is. ??
12:21

~Kevin Lever
Drake Ring-necked duck still at Hedgeley on first lake east of A697. South Charlton : a hunting Merlin and 2 Whimbrel in field. 13:13
4

~David Richens

Tricky to get sharp detail on these, thank you for letting us all know they have returned. 18:55
2

~Jon B

Stonechat with food at Ford Moss this morning. Brief views of Garden Warbler and Jay NFY
6
12:22

Spotting Tip by Steve Newman

When you're abroad, I find that one of the best and quickest ways to identify a species if it is a "cousin" of a UK species. If you can identify or recognise the family it belongs to by its shape or colour, then you can use a field guide to help identify the actual species. Where would you start with these?

No 1

No 3

No 5

No 7

No 2

No 4

No 6

Answers over page

Some are relatively easy like the Oystercatcher and Kingfisher but others not so.

1 American Oyster Catcher, Sea of Cortez, Mexico
2 Cape Petral, Antarctica
3 Cape Verde Islands Sparrow
4 Crested Serpent Eagle, Chitwell Nayional Park, Nepal
5 Grey Headed Kingfisher, Cape Verde Islands
6 Indian Pond Heron, Gujrat, NW India
7 Oriental or Rufous Turtle Dove, Osaka, Japan

Steve Newman
www.stevenewman.co.uk

Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - April 2025

Well, its now the time that our unusual nesting Goldeneye ducks start nesting in the Breamish Valley and to date we have located 14 nesting females. The males do hang around close to the nest sites for a few days but then rapidly loose interest and move off back to the local lakes to look for new females. They lay their clutch of eggs over a couple of weeks and then start incubating them. So far, we have come across clutches ranging from 8 to 13, 14, and 20! This later nest was being incubated but it's very unlikely they are all laid by one female. Much more likely the nest has been visited by another one or two females who have added their own eggs to the nest. This '*nest dumping*' behaviour is a problem because the first female does tend to desert such over-large nests before they hatch.

We have ringed three new ducks and retrapped three more. These retraps are from 2024 [FJ64661]; 2021 [FH92090]; and 2023 [FH79945] and have all successfully nested in previous years. There is still time for other females to start nesting in empty boxes, assuming they have not been taken over by Jackdaws and Tawny Owls. The owls are in fact useful because they tend to discourage jackdaws from taking over boxes and the Goldeneye seem quite content to nest alongside the owls.

Tawny Owls started nesting in March and as well as four being located in the Breamish Valley area, we have located another seven (and a Mandarin Duck) nesting. My colleague Hilary has already returned to nests near Longframlington and ringed three owlets; and two near Longhorsley, ringing two and three respectively. An interesting observation from one tawny box was the collection of prey items apparently brought in by the male owl. This consisted of several voles, a Wood Mouse and a Water Shrew! The Water Shrew is the very black small mammal in the photo. Another owl is around 10 years old and has just hatched her two chicks near Powburn (see pics).

Ringer's Roundup

Some spring ringing near Longfram (Hilary's site) saw returning migrant Chiffchaffs (Warblers) in March (in fact many of you will have heard them singing in your own gardens) but Willow Warblers were much slower to arrive and we did not ring a new one until the 21/4/25. We can now say they have 'returned back' from Africa but their numbers still seem quite low, compared to Chiffchaffs and for example Blackcap (Warblers). Ringing again near Longhorsley on the 30th produced a surprise new young bird (just out of the nest); this was a Juvenile Siskin - looking a bit like a female but with soft golden tones rather that green and yellow.

Another colleague (another Phil) who was out with two University Research Students near Wooperton came across a surprise brood of four Lapwing chicks which they were able to ring on the 27th April. This is really very early and shows that maybe the weather has helped these birds' nest early.

We will continue to monitor the Tawny Owls and Goldeneye ducks into May and look forward to starting to check small boxes for your favourite small birds after the 10th May.

Meanwhile **its really helpful to the monitoring of the Breamish Valley Goldeneye if you can send me your sitings (photos optional) of broods out on the water** at Branton and Hedgeley *(and anywhere else; for example Caistron*). The earliest date I have ever known of a brood being spotted was the 2/5/25 but normally it's more like the middle of the month when they appear. Later they can creche-up to be broods with more than one female and a few male outriders.

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

Epilogue

Fancy some bird oriented artwork? Take a look at the new shop opened on Amble Harbour. Great selection of bird life.

I thought I'd try a bit of AI and asked ChatGPT to wite a small article about the bird of the month for May in Northumberland: this is what it suggested:

Bird of the Month – May: The Swallow (Hirundo rustica)

As May arrives in Northumberland, so too do the graceful silhouettes of swallows, returning from their epic 6,000-mile journey from southern Africa. Their arrival marks the true start of spring in the countryside — a season of renewal, warmth, and the flurry of nesting activity.

With their shimmering blue-black plumage, red throats, and long forked tails, swallows are a welcome sight skimming low over fields and village greens, hawking for insects on the wing. By May, they're busily rebuilding old nests in barns, sheds, and under eaves — or starting fresh ones with mud and grass.

Northumberland's open landscapes and farm buildings make it an ideal stronghold for these aerial acrobats. Keep an eye out near farmyards, quiet lanes, and even coastal cliffs, where they swoop and chatter, filling the air with their cheerful, twittering song.

But not all is easy for these travellers. Swallow numbers have dipped in parts of the UK due to habitat loss and changing climates along their migration route. So this May, take a moment to appreciate their return — it's a small miracle, repeated every spring.

Did you know? Swallows often return to the same nest year after year. Some pairs even reunite!

A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

Please be sure, if you are still putting out peanuts in your garden feeders, that they cannot be extracted whole: when fed to fledglings they can cause choking.

Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

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.