June Newsletter

Speaker John Lumby

Osprey harassed by Crow - Brian Rutter ©

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Club Information

Chair
Neil Hinchliff

neilskye8@gmail.com

Secretary
Paul Ashdown
01665 576771

ashbauve.pm@gmail.com

Committee Member
Alan Goodall

Vice Chair
John Lumby

Treasurer
Alan Yeomans
07541 760731

a.yeomans720@btinternet.com

Committee Member
Kevin Lever

Committee Member
07850963511 Tanja Lister

tanja.lister03@gmail.com

Honorary President
Graham Bell

Committee Member
Chris Cobb

Committee Member
Jon Bowen
jbvalor@gmail.com

Committee Member
Ian Wilson
07947 586673

Membership Secretary
Maureen Cobb

07816 506745
m_e_cobb@msn.com

Bird Recorder
Paul Armstrong

nnbcrecords@yahoo.com

On-Line Editor
Richard Poyer

ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

Newsletter Editor
John McCutcheon

john@waterstar.uk

Check out our Digital 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)

Fiona Southern

Liz Harrison

At this coming Friday's indoor meeting, both Fiona Southern and Liz Harrison will be standing down from the committee. On behalf of everyone at NNBC we would like to extend our deepest gratitude to them for their outstanding dedication and service to the club over many years.

Their commitment, hard work, and passion have been steadfast for over 10 years as committee members and they have been driving forces behind so many of our achievements. In their specific roles - Fiona as Membership Secretary and Liz as Programme Coordinator - to their unwavering support in day-to-day activities, their contribution has left a lasting impact on the club and all its members.

As they step down from their roles, their legacy will remain. Their leadership, wisdom, and enthusiasm will be greatly missed; but never forgotten. While they will be missed on the committee, we know they will continue to be part of the club in other ways, and enjoy a well-earned break from their responsibilities.

The committee thanks them both for their marvellous reigns, yet hope they will still have lots to input in the future.

Liz recently handed over her role as Programme Coordinator to committee member Kevin Lever, while Fiona's role of Membership Secretary will be passing to Maureen Cobb with immediate effect.

Noticeboard

WEBS Volunteers

Kathy Evans; BTO's Northumbeland Wetland Bird Survey (WeBs) representative would like to advise the club that there are still locations requiring coverage...these are...

- Whiteadder Water
- Tweed (A1 to Gainslaw House)
- Spittal to Saltpan Rocks (near Cocklawburn)

If there are any interested club members, please make yourself knownthis coming Friday, or by email at anytime, and I will be delighted to explain what is required.

Neil Hinchliff

WEBS Reports

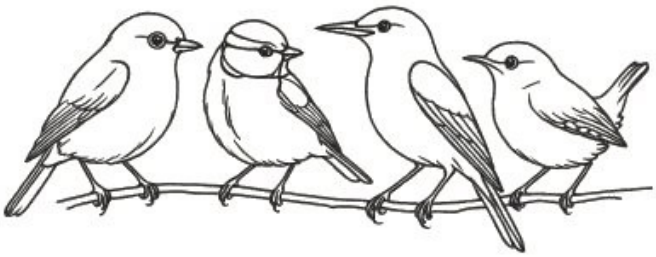
Robert Leetham has some annual WEBS reports from 1996/7 to 2008/9 (excluding 1998 to 2001 for some reason!). Free to anyone who is interested.

Contact Robert on berwick1959@googlemail.com

July and August

While there are no club meetings in July and August there will be a summer newsletter so please watch for it in your inbox. If you would like to submit an article or other contribution to that newsletter I'd be happy to receive it.

John McCutcheon



"How can a bird that is born for joy sit in a cage and sing? "

William Blake

Upcoming Field Trips

Details for next season in our summer newsletter

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

Details for next season in our summer newsletter

New members welcome at meetings

See web site for details of other Meetings

Speaker's Presentation

John Lumby - South East Australia & The Outback

On Friday 9th May, the club's very own Vice Chairman - John Lumby - gave 32 members and their guests a presentation of two 'once in a lifetime' trips to SE Australia.

The first took place in September of 2016 and was a small, guided tour organised by Birdfinders. Being Springtime in Australia, the group of five were looking forward to comparatively good weather. Alas this was not to be, and the elements proved rather challenging - especially as the group had arrived with all the wrong clothing. It rained pretty solidly for the duration of the two week trip and when it wasn't raining it was snowing!

Having landed in Melbourne, the group drove along the coast via Dandeong and Wilson's Promontory, stopping at several birding hotspots, resulting in sightings of the Tawny Frogmouth, Powerful Owl, Pallid Cuckoo and Striated Fieldwren. Their coastal route continued as far as Malacoota and the Croajingalong National Park, clocking up further sightings: this time, Red-necked Stint, Sooty Oystercatcher and Red-capped Plover.

From here, the route back-tracked to Sale and up the Great Alpine Road into the Alpine National Park, producing sightings of Hooded Plover, Black-fronted Dotterel and Latham's Snipe, then on, via Omeo and Mount Hotham. The group continued to Chiltern National Park and Warby Ranges, and defying the ongoing drab elements were a magnificent array of exotic birds: **Flame Robin,** Superb and Turquoise Parrot.

Further north into New South Wales and Deniliquin, the group went in search of one of the trip's target species, the critically endangered Plains Wanderer. As their luck would have it, the bird was heard, but alas, not spotted.

The slow route back to Melbourne took the group to the Annuello Reserve and the Hattah Kulkyne National Park, the group's efforts were rewarded with a close sighting of the very scarce **Emu Wren** popping up just in front of them. The unrelenting rain continued and the bird looked as soaked through as the group themselves! Further sightings included the Regent Parrot, Blue Bonnet, **White winged Fairy Wren** and **variegated Fairy Wren.**

Speaker's Presentation

For the last highlight, the search had been on for one of John's target species on the return leg at Otway, the Beach Stone Curlew. However, despite an array of species, including Pink Robin, Brush Bronzewing and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, the Beach Stone Curlew remained elusive! However, the trip culminated in an impressive tally of 236 species.

The second trip took place over three weeks in August/September 2019- just coming out of Australian wintertime and was organised by a lifelong birding friend of John's, Brian and centred on the Australian Outback around the aptly named Birdsville.

Brian and John had first met in their late teens, sharing a love of birding as members of the Teesside Bird Club. After many years of discussion and planning, Brian, civil engineer turned world renowned ornithologist, organised the three-week trip into the Australian Outback.

However, unfinished business dictated the first stop and Brian took John on a detour to the coast near to Brisbane, the starting point of the trip, where, at long last, John set eyes upon the target species of the first trip, the **Beach Stone Curlew** at Bribri Island.

The route then took them and Brian's wife on a 5000km trip into the Outback, travelling via Roma, Quilpie and Windorah, where the route turned into unmetalled dirt tracks, impassible after heavy rain, all the way to Birdsville. Fortunately, Brian had persuaded another friend to join their trip, providing the safety net of another vehicle in the event of a breakdown.

The 'serious birdwatching' started when the group arrived at Betoota, also known for its horse and camel racing through the outback. The group's efforts were rewarded with a sighting of the Australian Pratincole.

The flora and fauna captured on the camera were superb and the group was treated to wonderful images of exotic looking birds, such as the **Spinifex** - surely the pigeon of all pigeons, the Red **Browed Pardalote**, flocks of Cockatiels, **Galahs** and Budgerigars. The latter was yet another target species for John, being keen to see these birds in the wild, and only inhabiting the very central area of the Outback near Birdsville.

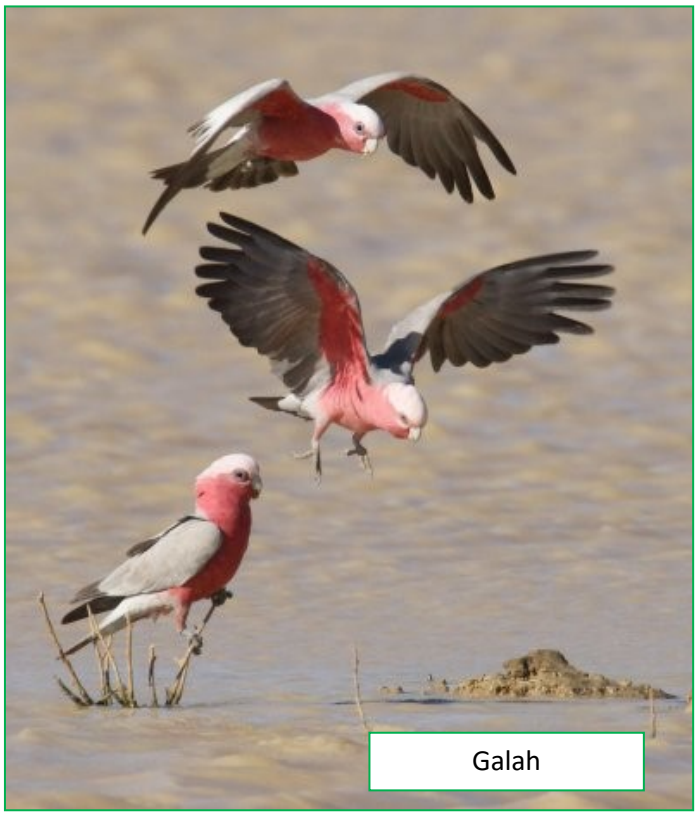
Speaker's Presentation

It was during the time spent around Birdsville that provided the group with sightings of some elusive species, such as the Australian Bustard, Bourke's Parrot, Grey Grasswren, Redthroat, Cinnamon Quail Thrush and the suitably named **Splendid Fairy Wren**.

Of note were also the Inland Dotterel, elusive and completely hidden to the untrained eye, only becoming visible (often in large numbers) at very close range.

The return trip took the group via Charlesville to the Bowra Reserve, an ex-sheep station covering 70,000 hectares and yet more fantastic species, such as the Chestnut-breasted Quail Thrush. From here, it was back to Brisbane and one last 'Hurrah' at the O'Reilly's Nature Reserve to finish off the trip, providing yet another highlight, the Whiplash bird. Named after its strange call, these are very hard to spot in the wild, however, the secret to beckoning these birds out of hiding proved none other than John's digestive biscuits!

Speaker's Presentation



Galah

Pink Robin - Male

Superb Fairy-Wren - Male

Thank you, John, it was a wonderful opportunity to share the experiences of two very species and experience-rich trips. It certainly provided ample encouragement - for those of us unfamiliar with the country - and the impetus needed to think about planning our own 'trip of a lifetime'.

Tanja Lister

Field Trip Report

Dawn Chorus at Ford & Etal – 11th May 2025 - Led by James Joicey

The sun rose at 5.00am, a ball of blinding pink clashing with the fluorescent yellow of the oilseed rape in front of us. It heralded one of the most beautiful mornings in the whole history of the annual Dawn Chorus walks at Ford & Etal, this one being the 32nd to be precise. It was particularly good to meet new faces amongst the already 'weel-kent hardy annuals'.

From the magnificent oak trees at Tindal House Farm we moved towards the river, through fields of rippling barley, watching numerous Hares, with Tree Sparrows and Yellowhammers along the large hawthorn hedges. As we approached the wood with its fringe of blackthorn, there was plenty of noise from the warbler family: Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Blackcap, and finally a Garden Warbler. The view from the gate into the steep grass field down to the river was stunning, and we recorded many wild flowers as we descended. The sun had risen enough by this point so that mist was curling up off the river; against the light it was a truly magical sight.

The river is low after the dry weather so it was quiet, allowing us to hear species in the ancient semi-natural woodland above us as well as those on the riverbank. A fledgling Dipper stood preening itself on a rock, its grey-green plumage dull in comparison to the rich dark chocolate brown and crisp white bib of its parent. A brood of Dippers usually comprises three youngsters who all disperse to different places, close enough for the adult to be able to reach them.

A flash of a Kingfisher (repeated a little later as it darted back downstream) and a plentiful number of Mallard enjoying the sunshine, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sand Martins and Siskins were all around us, and then

suddenly – out of nowhere – a solitary Barnacle Goose flew overhead.

The old stile at the top of the hill tested the agility of our senior members – triumphantly – before we walked along the arable fields again to our cars, transferring to Etal Manor to enjoy a walk through the woodland garden. Here, the first Spotted Flycatcher had arrived and a Jay flitted through the trees on a couple of occasions.

Field Trip Report

We watched a Buzzard sitting on a pole under attack from an angry Mistle Thrush before it flapped away up the hill.

The Swifts had just arrived too, to join the Swallows and House Martins. Another ornithological summer is finally complete. The colours in the garden were magnificent against a cloudless blue sky; Harriet hopes that these will last until the garden is open for a fundraising event for the Northumberland Hospice on Sunday 15th June. We shall see.

Once again, a very convivial breakfast was enjoyed and a round of applause given to Harriet for her skills with the frying pan. The list of species was read: we had 49. However, a report of a Grey Partridge on the verge of the road in to Tindal House was readily accepted and we can therefore report The Full 50, though as always there were some surprising omissions.

Harriet thanks everyone for their most generous contributions to her bowl for local charities: the wonderful sum of £226.

Species count:

Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Barnacle Goose, Mallard, Grey Partridge, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Kingfisher, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Yellowhammer

Photos courtesy of Andrew Green

Field Trip Report

St Abbs – 24th May 2025 - Led by Chris Cobb and Neil Hinchliff

On a day forecast to be windy with showers, nine members + one guest met in the National Trust for Scotland carpark.

Before setting off we had the usual early birds on the list – Wood Pigeon, House Sparrow, Wren etc. We walked down past the visitor centre, checking the sitings board and carried on to the viewpoint overlooking the cliffs at Starney Bay adding Skylark, Goldfinch among others to our list.

Looking over the cliffs we saw Herring Gull, Guillemot, Cormorant, Fulmar and a flypast of a small number of Canada Geese. 21 species so far.

On the path uphill a distant Yellowhammer was spotted on the rocks below. Two more were seen later in the walk. Linnet, Stonechat and Razorbill added to the list.

By the time we reached the top of the path above Burnmouth Harbour coats were discarded by a few members.

Here the group split into two, four climbers taking the higher route hoping to see the Peregrine (unfortunately not seen), the rest staying on the lower less windy path.

After meeting up again, with no additions to the list, (now at 32 species) we sat for lunch in the shelter from the wind overlooking the old walled garden.

Suitably refreshed, we set off to walk round the cliffs where we saw large numbers of Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake - but not a vast number of Gannet.

We then headed down to Mire Loch where the group again split up, going either side of the Loch. Whinchat, Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler were added to the list.

One group got a distant view of the elusive Peregrine.

Species total was now 44.

Another St Abbs visit without seeing the Northern Brown Argus butterfly.

The last leg of the six mile walk was along the track back to the carpark, adding among others, Robin & Pheasant.

A final total of 53 species.

Another very sociable day's birdwatching was completed with the obligatory coffee/tea and cake at the cafe.

Thanks to Neil for photos and joint leading with me.

Chris Cobb

Photos courtesy Neil Hinchliff, Jon Bowen and John McCutcheon

Species List (53)

Barn Swallow
Blackbird (Eurasian)
Black-headed Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake
Blue Tit (Eurasian)
Bullfinch (Eurasian)
Canada Goose
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Chiffchaff
Collared Dove
Common Gull
Common Pheasant
Common Whitethroat
Coot (Eurasian)
Dunnock
Jackdaw
Shag
Feral Pigeon
Goldfinch
Great Black-backed Gull
Great Cormorant
Guillemot
Herring Gull
House Martin
House Sparrow
Linnet
Little Grebe
Mallard
Meadow Pipit
Mute Swan
Northern Fulmar
Northern Gannet
Oystercatcher (Eurasian)
Peregrine Falcon
Pied Wagtail
Razorbill
Reed Bunting
Robin (European)
Rock Pipit
Rook
Sedge Warbler
Skylark (Eurasian)
Song Thrush
Starling
Stock Dove
Stonechat European)
Tree Sparrow
Whinchat
Willow Warbler
Woodpigeon
Wren (Eurasian)
Yellowhammer

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for May 2025...

Barnacle Goose	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
Egyptian Goose	2 at Warkworth on 23rd	P&AH
	2 at River Coquet on 16th	PCA
Common Scoter	At Warkworth on 2nd	JHB
Grey Partridge	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
Cuckoo	1 at Harbottle on 23rd	JMcC
	1 at Ford Moss on 17th	P&AH
	1 at Hulne Park on 6th	P&AH
	1 at Ford Moss on 8th and 27th	PCA
Stock Dove	At Warkworth on 6th	JHB
Crane	1 at Beal on 27th	NH
Avocet	22 at Newton Scrape on 30th	PCA
American Golden Plover	1 at Holy Island Causeway on 18th	NH
	1 at Holy Island Causeway on 19th	PN&MN
Dotterel	10 at Beal on 8th and 7 on 19th	PN&MN
Whimbrel	At Buston Links on 18th	JHB
Temminck's Stint	1 at Newton Scrape on 17th	PCA
Purple Sandpiper	At Coquet Island on 14th	JHB
Greenshank	1 at Berwick on 12th	NH
Roseate Tern	At Coquet Island on 14th	JHB
Black Tern	1 at Long Nanny on 25th (American)	NH
	1 at Long Nanny on 30th (American)	PCA
Osprey	1 at Branton on 6th	JMcC
Kingfisher	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
Jay	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
	1 at Ford Moss on 8th	PCA
Sedge Warbler	1 at Ford Moss on 28th May	BRW
Garden Warbler	1 at Branton on 9th	JMcC
	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
Nuthatch	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
Treecreeper	1 at Harbottle on 23rd	JMcC
Ring Ouzel	1 at Harthope Valley on 23rd	PCA
Spotted Flycatcher	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
	4 at Harthope Valley on 23rd	PCA
Dipper	1 at Pauperhaugh on 3rd	JMcC
	At Etal on 11th of May	NNBC
	4 at Hulne Park on 6th	P&AH
	1 at Harthope Valley on 23rd	PCA
Bullfinch	2 at Branton on 15th	JMcC
	1 at Ford Moss on 8th	PCA
Redpoll	3 at Ford Moss on 8th and 6 on 27th	PCA
Shoveler x Blue-winged Teal	1 at Buston Links on 1st	JHB

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Jon Bowen (JHB)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Phil & Marge Noble (PN&MN)
Barry Whitehead (BRW)
NNBC Field Trip (NNBC)

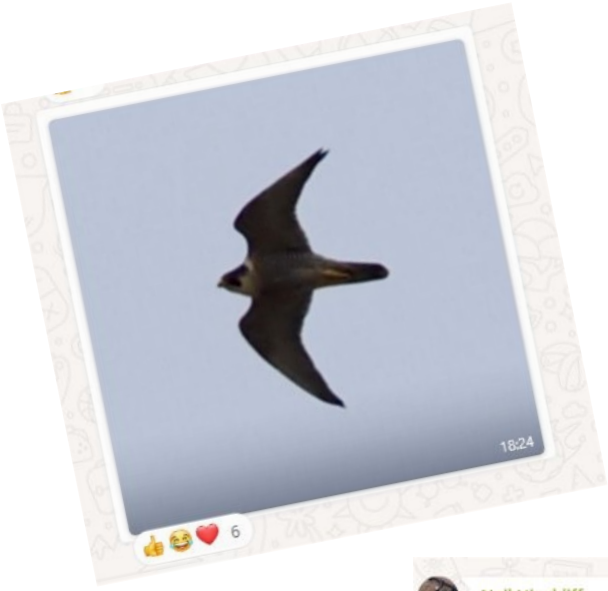
A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

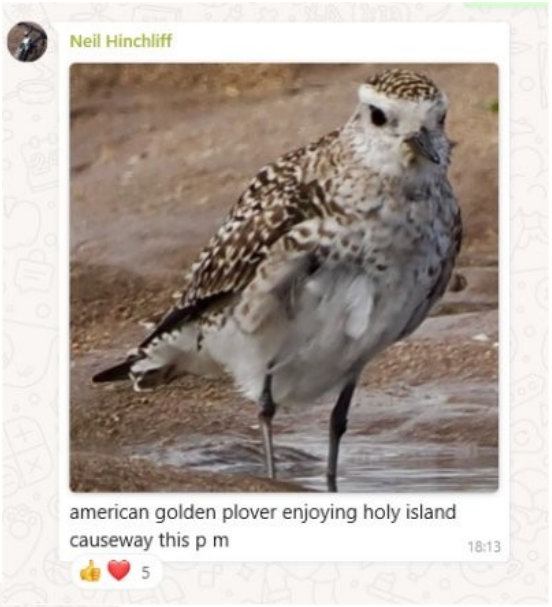
"Mowing your lawn not only invigorates it but also enables harassed Blackbird and Thrush parents to locate food more easily. In prolonged dry spells keep one area damp to attract worms and other invertebrates near the surface."

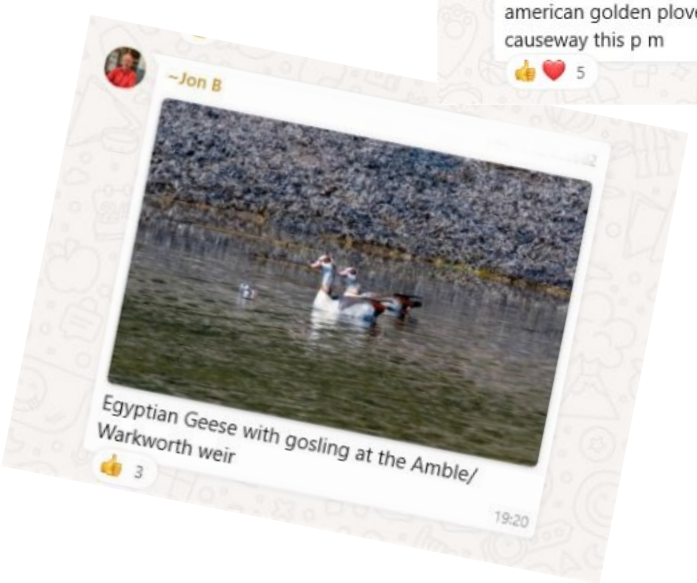
Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters

What's Up on WhatsApp

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







Members' Contributions

A Very Chance Encounter - John McCutcheon

Tuesday May 6th and I was awake and downstairs fairly early: my wife was off on a jolly to York with friends and got picked up early. Willow (our Golden Retriever) and I chatted about what to do with the day! We agreed a walk in Ingram Valley, followed by coffee for me and a swim for her would be a good start.

Quick check on emails and got one from Richard Poyer asking if "*Branton and Hedgeley are still good to see a fair range of birds?*". My response "*Branton should reap a good range, most tits, blackcap, several warblers, goldeneye and the usual collection of ducks - enjoy wherever you go*".

Breakfast finished, we got ready and set off for Ingram. Half way there I decided to stop off at Branton for the walk; might bump into Richard! Popped the binoculars on and set off to walk clockwise (unusually for me) from the car park to top left of the western pond; didn't want to bump into any Adders with the dog, so avoided their favourite spot at the top end of the path between the two lakes.

Did a little spotting on the way and among others got Great Crested Grebe, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Yellowhammer, Goldeneye as well as Mallard, Greylag and Canada Geese all with young.

Getting back to the car, popped Willow in and thought I'd have a last look around the car park and overhead saw a raptor. Even far off I knew it wasn't Kestrel or Buzzard and thought at first it could be a Harrier. With only my phone the chance of getting a good photo was remote (as you can see). As it got nearer though I thought it could possibly be an Osprey; I was over 50% sure it was.

Osprey - Brian Rutter ©

Two guys arrived back at their car and I enquired if they were birders: "*Amateurs*" came the reply. Similar to me I thought. Together we decided the possibility of it being an Osprey had increased. It was being harassed separately by a Crow and an Oyster Catcher and several birds were making alarm calls. Another car pulled into the car park; and two guys arrived: same discussion with a "*Kind of*" response.

Mentioned the perceived Osprey and they both pulled cameras with large lenses from the car. A few minutes later, great photos taken and the Osprey was confirmed. Introductions made; I requested if Brian would mind sending me a photo for the newsletter; the shots here and on front page are what he sent later in the day.

My first ever view of an Osprey in Northumberland. Thank you so much to Brian Rutter for the photos and to Richard Poyer for inadvertently causing me to visit Branton that morning.

Osprey - Brian Rutter ©

A Ringer's Year - May 2025

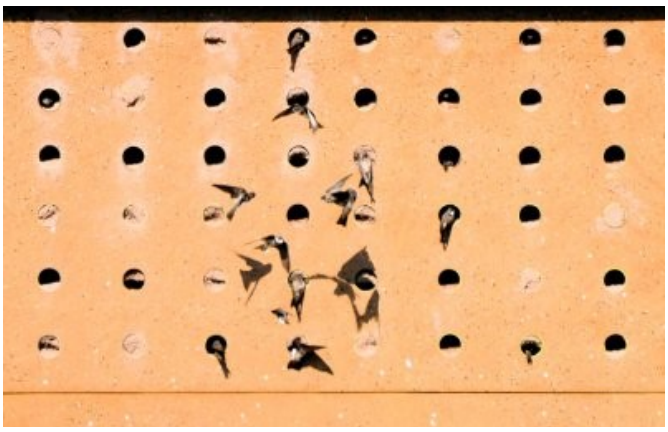
Well, our unusual nesting Goldeneye ducks, in the Breamish Valley, are progressing well with the earliest date I have so far for a large brood of 15 being out on the water, at Branton, being the 13th May. This is a bit later than last year so if anyone spotted an earlier brood then it would be good to hear about it. Also has anyone spotted a larger creche of ducklings with more than one female and a few male outriders? The ducks suffer from competition (and outright interference) from the local jackdaws but some start late and manage to use boxes that are not completely filled up with jackdaw sticks. One of these did not start incubating her clutch of 9 until around the start of the month; three weeks after her fellow females. We also gained access to a new pool on the 28th April and quickly put a box up as there were several pairs of ducks paddling around close by. Checking this box on the 21/5/25 Alison & I got the nice surprise of 5 brand new goldeneye eggs! There were also two broods of goldeneye out on the water (one quite large), which is the first time we have seen evidence of birds having found their own nesting holes (*that is not using our boxes*). So, we are now aware of 15 nests (in boxes); which is the same as last year. Please see pictures of an adult and eggs.

Meanwhile south of Rothbury my colleague Hilary has been encountering another beautiful duck (*using boxes originally put up for Tawny Owls*). These are Mandarins whose population is very slowly moving north (from the Tyne Valley). Like the goldeneye they lay a lot of eggs. See picture below of an adult female.

Checking on Tawny Owls has been a big part of this month, especially for Hilary, with a total of 16 pairs attempting to nest. Eleven of these have hatched eggs and most look like they will fledge in early June. From ringing we can tell that we have nesting females who are respectively at least 8, 11 & 15 yrs old. However, the populations of tawny owls does seem to be 'stuck' (not increasing) so as the individual owls get older it may start to decline.

Ringer's Roundup

I reported on the artificial Sand Martin Bank built near Longhorsley in March. Well at the start of the month some Sand Martins actually discovered it and started digging out some sand to make their nest holes. Another local Naturalist Chris D. first spotted this and then Alison got some close-up pictures using a long lens (see picture). Hilary and I will not check for actual nesting until the middle of June so as to make sure the birds are fully settled in.



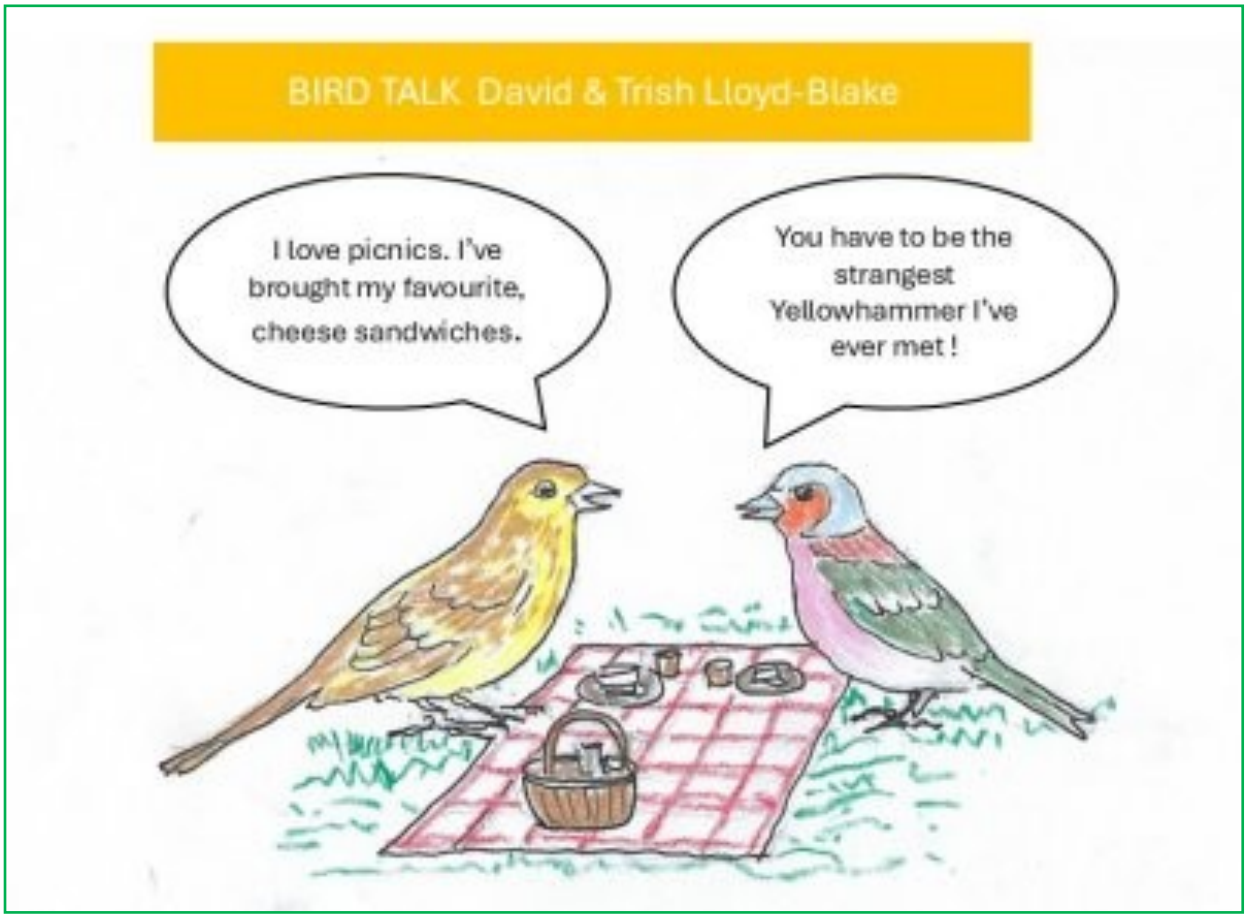
This month is also the busy time for nesting small passerines like tits and we encountered a female Marsh Tit on the 15th that we originally ringed in a nest box in 2024 (as an adult) on a farm near Longhorsley. On 15/5/25 she was in another box (on the same farm) with 7 young which were all ringed by a new trainee. Returning to check another box on an adjacent property, that I originally thought contained a nesting Coal Tit, we were assailed by a loud '*pichay*' call. This was another Marsh Tit and I was able to ring 6 well developed young tits (see picture) on the 24th.Ringing with Hilary on the 16th near Brinkburn brought another welcome surprise of a large nest of Nuthatches.

We ringed 8 (see picture) and also observed some fascinating modifications that the adults had made to the box. Using 'mud' they had modified the entrance hole to create a descending 'tunnel' into the box.

We have started to monitor our nesting Barn Owls but with 100 plus sites we have not finished yet and I will save news of these until next month. However, news of one female owl that nested near Bamburgh last year has been fascinating but sad. Barn Owl [GY85067] was found dead on the Forties Bravo Oil Platform on the 4/4/25 (288km's from home)! So, we will have to see if another owl has filled her slot.

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.