

# Berwick Wildlife Group

[www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk)



## Monthly Review: April 2018.

### WILDLIFE REPORTS.

#### **Weather**

It is noticeable that our weather systems seem to be becoming more vigorous, year on year. This was notable through April, when the difference within a fortnight could have not been more contrasting, with a cold wind blowing, snow showers and a daytime temperature of 40F on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, then the warmest April day for 50 years, with a temperature of 72F, on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

With Spring having been on hold throughout March, the cold persisted into the first week of the month. Dull, cold conditions were made even more dreary by persistent spells of sleet and rain, including on the 4<sup>th</sup>, when steady rain fell all day with a total of 30mm ( 1.2 inches.) - a record wet day for any time of the year!

That wet day brought a change in wind direction to a more normal south-westerly and a rise in temperature by 10 degrees. After another wet day on the 10<sup>th</sup>, sunnier conditions followed with a rise of a further 10 degrees over the next week, culminating in that hot day on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The wind was coming from the south, bringing with it a Mediterranean 'plume' of hot air from North Africa. It could not last; over the following week the month got back to the average for mid-April, with sunshine and showers on a south-west wind. A cold north-east wind developed over the last two days of the month, due to a strong low pressure affecting the south-east of England. This caused a near gale-force wind on the coast, making blue skies and sunshine a cold experience.

That wet day on the 19<sup>th</sup> brought the rainfall total for the month well up on the average of 39.6mm (1.56 inches) during the last decade, with a total of 75mm (2.95 inches).

#### **Birds**

The Spring migration has been very erratic, due to the contrast in weather conditions week by week throughout the month. Most summer migrants arrived late by up to three weeks, while a number of winter visitors were still with us.

The cold spell with bitter winds saw 142 **Greylag Geese** along with 38 **Pink footed Geese** in the coastal fields at Cocklawburn (5<sup>th</sup>). Poor coastal conditions, high winds and a large swell at high tide saw the geese joined by a flock of 42 **Turnstone** feeding in the field with them. Two tolerant male **Wheatears** were also there, giving hope of better things to come. Even with the rough conditions at sea, a flock of 160 **Common Scoter** were noted at Cheswick. Inland a fine **Black Redstart** was seen again at Grange Road, Berwick, amongst the new houses. It would seem this high point in town is an overlooked migration point, as both Redstart and Black Redstart were noted here last Spring. Five **Goldeneye** were unusual visitors to Middle Ord Pond (6<sup>th</sup>), with 52 Teal and 30 Fieldfare seen there two days later. A flock of 18 **Redwing** were in the hedge at West Ord.

A **Chiff-chaff** was heard at Clayholes Shiel, East Ord(8<sup>th</sup>) with 5 **Sand Martins** upstream at West Ord seen the following day. A pair of **Shelduck** and 12 **Wigeon** were in Yarrow Slake. Two Chiff-chaff and a

**Nuthatch** were found at Marshall Meadows, during a Rook survey there. A fine male **Brambling** visited a member's bird feeder in Riverdene, Tweedmouth (11<sup>th</sup>) with a **Blackcap** there the following day.

The WeBS count on the Estuary (12<sup>th</sup>) noted a **Red throated Diver** and a **Shag** at Calot Shad with a grand total of 212 **Redshank** gathered, mainly at Yarrow Slake. A **Willow Warbler** was calling at Castle Hills(14<sup>th</sup>), and 5 returning **Lesser black backed Gulls** appeared in the Calot Shad gull roost. A **Swallow** was noted flying north over Ord Moor (15<sup>th</sup>), but a surprise was two drake **Mandarin** ducks on Middle Ord pond. The Mandarin is a feral bird in this country, breeding in the Borders Region for a number of years. Presumably these two came from that population. The same day saw a very nervous adult **Whooper Swan** at West Ord where two **Bullfinch** were seen. An early **Whitethroat** was seen and heard at Clayholes Shiel along with another 3 Bullfinches.

A group of 5 **Sandwich Terns** were roosting on Saltpan rocks, Cocklawburn(16<sup>th</sup>) with a party of 14 **Linnets** also noted. The same day saw a **White Wagtail** recorded on Little Beach. A group of 5 **Stock Doves** were seen at Whiteadder Point(17<sup>th</sup>), with a pair of Shelduck and 3 **Jays** at West Ord.

A visit to Needles Eye(19<sup>th</sup>), recorded 450 Kittiwake, 130 Guillemot and 14 Razorbill on the sea, but very few birds occupying nest sites. A light passage of Swallows were also noted with a covey of three **Grey Partridge** and a male **Sparrowhawk** on the cliff top fields. A pair of **Tufted Duck** were present at Chain Bridge, Horncliffe (20<sup>th</sup>) with a fine adult **Osprey** soaring over 'Simpson's Mill', Tweedmouth at midday, causing panic amongst the breeding gulls there.

A slow trickle of northbound Martins and Swallows were seen at Cocklawburn (23<sup>rd</sup>) with a **House Martin** seen briefly over the pond there. Along the shore 6 Turnstones and 3 **Purple Sandpipers** were at Cheswick Black rocks and 4 **Arctic Terns** with a number of Sandwich Tern roosting at Saltpan rocks. At sea there were 12 Guillemots and 4 Razorbills.

A fine male **Siskin** visited feeders in Cornwall Avenue (24<sup>th</sup>) with the first local returning House Martin arriving at dusk. A male Wheatear was seen at Cocklawburn (26<sup>th</sup>) with a group of 20 Greylag still present. A Dawn Chorus walk early on 28<sup>th</sup> found a singing **Garden Warbler** with Blackcaps in voice at Tommy the Miller's field, an opportunity to listen to the slight difference in song. A Nuthatch was calling in the trees by the Railway Station. A strong cold NE wind on the 30<sup>th</sup> brought a strong sea bird movement to the coast. An hour's count of 2,500 Gannets and 1,750 Kittiwake were seen passing Berwick pier, mid-afternoon on the rising tide. It also brought a Red throated Diver into the Estuary, this bird in full summer plumage.

## **Mammals**

Unsurprisingly, hardly any records this month A **Brown Hare** noted on the road at Middle Ord farm(8<sup>th</sup>). A pod of 5 **Bottle nosed Dolphins** seen off Cocklawburn beach (5th and 23rd) and 2 **Harbour Porpoise** also there(19<sup>th</sup>).

## **Insects**

Butterflies; Normally, we are getting numbers of butterflies on the wing towards the end of the month, but the cold conditions are keeping numbers down.

A Peacock was noted in a Castle Terrace garden(9<sup>th</sup>) with one or two **Small Tortoiseshell** starting to appear. An over wintering **Red Admiral** was seen in a Highfields garden from the 12th to 16<sup>th</sup>, roosting in a high Lawson cypress hedge at night.. A walk along to Needles Eye(19<sup>th</sup>), found a **Small White**, six Small Tortoiseshells and a lone Peacock. Warmer conditions in May have to bring an improvement!!

Many thanks to Malcolm Hutcheson for the above. He also writes:

### Ellie's Fieldfare

I was fascinated recently when my neighbour told me that her nine year old grand-daughter had written about the Fieldfares visiting our gardens during the spell of snow last month, for her weekly writing project. She used Granny's bird book (Wayside & Woodland Birds by Warne) to help her write her essay. She let me see it and I was so impressed that I thought you might like to share it with me..

'A new visitor to the Garden'.

"This is a new bird from Scandinavia. There are two pairs that have arrived and are quite happy in granny's garden. The birds are slightly bigger than our blackbirds and have a slate grey head and rump and the feather's on its back are a warm brown, the bill is dark brown.

I looked in granny's bird book and discovered the bird is called a Fieldfare. They have a harsh call, tsak – tsak – task. I think it belongs to the thrush family. It is nomadic and flies from place to place.

The Fieldfare likes to fly in strong winds and at great speed and land and eat anything they can see. They have certainly been really greedy since visiting granny's garden. She has been feeding them Apples and Pears and they won't leave the dish. Even our blackbirds are being chased away. The fieldfare is so very greedy he's sitting on the plate and won't budge fore anything and even pecking at the Sparrows.

So granny has discovered a trick. She has a small pine bush in her front garden, what she did was tucked some chopped apples under the bush for the blackbirds and sparrows, because they sometimes shelter under the bush when its wet and windy, so they can keep cosy.

So now all the birds are happy and fed."

Ellie Jefferson, (Aged 9). Tweedmouth West School, (Year 4).

Ellie's teacher, Mrs Robertson, gave her a 'credit' and said 'Your granny really looks after the birds.'

This to me was a 'breath of fresh air', as the younger generation are often labelled as not interested in the world around them, only interested in I-pads conversations, celebs etc. It's a reminder that our youth are observant and do care about what is around them (even if Ellie used the same reference book I used 70 years ago!!)

### **Water voles ("Ratty" if you prefer)**

Back in March Kelly Hollings gave us an interesting and informative talk on Northumberland Wildlife Trust's "Restoring Ratty" programme. Two questions arose, which she couldn't answer on the night: namely could water voles tolerate the saline environment of the Tweed estuary, and re-establish here. Also, as a species that is now recognised to be not always as associated with water as its name suggests, when did it become aquatic?

As a good teacher should, Kelly duly came back to us with the answers:

Molly!

Please pass on – I was asked two questions last night that I couldn't answer.

One was do water voles tolerate saline conditions and the answer is yes! They move through saline habitats quite readily, they don't necessarily settle there and they love the club rush.

The second was when did they become aquatic and the answer is, we don't really know, they were still terrestrial in the 16/17 hundreds until Victorian times. In the Neolithic and roman periods, water voles inhabited the same environments as human settlements and they were eaten by people.

### **Photos and Reminder**

No pictures this month, but there will be some members' photos and videos, together with a presentation by Laura Shearer about the Coast Care project, after our (brief) **AGM on Weds 16<sup>th</sup> May, 7:30 p.m. at the United Reformed Church, Spittal.**

The number of records are still down this month, as the web-site is still not functioning properly.

I can only apologise for the BWG for that.

Can I suggest that members wishing to add their records to the newsletter, as a temporary measure, send them directly to me by the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month at **m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com**

### **We need all your records please.**

Type in sightings for the relevant month in **BWG Casual Sightings Newsletter.xls**

**With many thanks to Malcolm Hutcheson and the other recorders.** Please send us your records, and photos (digital or prints/slides to be scanned). Use our form on the Sightings page ([www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/Sightings.html](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/Sightings.html)), phone 01289 309046 or e-mail [mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](mailto:mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk).