

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Monthly Review: February 2019.

WILDLIFE REPORTS

Weather This February may well go down in the record books for the complete contrast in weather between the start and end of the month. We started the first week with a cold north-east wind which brought a light snow cover (2nd), with keen night frosts recorded all week. The lowest temperature was -6C (22F) on the 3rd. The bright days with some wintery showers were blown away on the 8th with a westerly gale, named Storm 'Erik' by the Irish 'Met' Office. As it swept over Scotland it brought some rain, but not enough to soak the ground.

As this gale passed through, a very large high pressure zone was building up over Europe, bringing us warm winds from the Azores and beyond. This gave us a dramatic change to mild temperatures throughout the rest of the month. For the next fortnight the temperature slowly rose until in the final week we had reached record levels for February. Warmest February day records were broken in both Scotland and Wales, with 16.3C (61F) reached in Aberdeenshire (18th), 19.1C (67F) in Powis (21st) and 20.6C (69F) in Trasgoed, West Wales (25th) with 20.4C (68F) at Northolt, London. The warmest U.K. record for February came on the 26th at Kew Gardens, with 21.2C (70F) - a memorable last week. The high pressure that had given us these warm conditions also brought chilly nights, but the mixture of hazy sunshine and light winds allowed daytime temperature to rise.

As mentioned earlier, very little rain has fallen over the month, indeed it's been the driest February over the last 25 years, with a total of 18 mm (0.7 inches) - not a good prospect for the agricultural and horticultural industries, with the possibility of dry conditions over the growing season.

With confirmation that this was the warmest February on record, the mild conditions are forecast to run into early March, but could there yet be another 'beast from the east'? With our weather this unpredictable, who knows?

A fine showing of the eclipse of a 'super' Moon was witnessed early dawn (21st) for those keen enough to rise at 7 a.m. - a splendid spectacle to start off the year.

Wildlife summary:

What contrasts this month has shown! The huge high altitude jetstream brought warm air all the way from the South Atlantic across Europe mid-month, causing the natural world to 'spring' into action (sorry!). By the 20th a few Martins and Swallows had reached Central England, along with the odd Wheatear and Black Redstart. Insects were also active in our area, with White tailed and Honey bees about in favoured gardens. A number of 6-spot Ladybirds are showing as well. I was amazed to see a Red Admiral feeding on my Viburnum tinus flowers on the 25th, which stayed around for the next three days, the earliest date I have ever recorded this butterfly.

We should keep observant over the next week or so while these conditions persist, as vagrant species are starting to appear in the south of England, such as a Levant Blackneck moth in a 'trap' on the Lizard, Cornwall (25th) and several Vagrant Emperor dragonflies showing up in Pembrokeshire, Dorset, Cornwall

and the Isles of Scilly. Best of all was a fine specimen of a Large Tortoiseshell butterfly in the Bird Observatory garden at Portland Bill, Dorset(25th).
MHu

Birds

It's been yet another fairly quiet month, despite the mild conditions. A **Red throated Diver** was in the estuary at Calot Shad(4th) along with two more in Spittal Bay. At Cocklawburn, (5th) a flock of 38 **Sanderling**, 12 **Purple Sandpiper** and 14 **Turnstone** were recorded. A large flock of 74 **Mallard** were on the pond there along with 7 **Tufted Duck**. A flock of 130 **Golden Plover** were nearby at Cheswick along with 146 **Greylag Geese**.

A pair of **Long tailed Duck** were still in Fisherman's Haven(6th) with 24 **Eider**. The animal feeders at West Ord (10th) attracted 14 **Yellowhammers** and 4 **Read Buntings**, with 6 **Fieldfares** in the hedgerow. A flock of 72 **Wigeon** were on New Water Heugh with 56 **Goldeneye** on the river. A party of 68 **Twite** were with the cattle troughs at Cocklawburn(11th) with 14 **Redshanks** and 2 **Dunlin** at the pond.

A family of 3 **Bullfinches** were at Clayholes Shiel, East Ord(12th), with 9 **Siskin** feeding in the Alder trees. On Middle Ord pond (17th) were 9 **Teal**, 3 **Wigeon** and a pair of **Greylag Geese**. Waders were building up at Cocklawburn (19th) with 74 **Sanderling**, 26 **Ringed Plover**, with 108 **Curlew** and 66 **Oystercatchers** in the fields. Around Hiveacres(20th) the **Goldfinch** flock visiting local feeders had reached 56 birds. On Spittal Bay were 18 **Common Scoters** and 3 **Shags**. Several skeins of **Pink footed Geese** were noted moving north(23rd), with 26 **Redwing** seen at Billylaw, Ord Moor. Six **Greylag geese** were at Middle ord pond with 18 **Teal** and a **Coot**. At West Ord (24th) were 18 **Canada Geese** along with 42 **Oystercatchers**.

Two **Whooper Swans** were on Yarrow Slake (25th) with 48 **Teal**, 12 **Goldeneye**, a pair of **Shelduck** and a **Little Egret**. A female **Blackcap** was still visiting gardens in Castle Terrace where it has been since last Christmas. Three **Guillemots** were at Cocklawburn, off Saltpan rocks.

Mammals

A group of 3 **Brown Hares** were at Cocklawburn(12th) with another, 'lifted' out of Clayholes Shiel Dene(13th). A female **Otter**, with an immature are still in the Outer Estuary, noted at the Lifeboat Station(4th). Surprisingly another female with 2 immatures was noted feeding under the A1 road bridge (15th). A large party of 7 **Roe Deer** was noted by the railway at Goswick (13th).

Insects

The warm conditions at the end of the month saw several species appear earlier than normal. A **Two-spot Ladybird** was 'out and about' in a Hiveacres garden(8th) with **White tailed Bumble Bee**(19th) and **Honey Bees**(22nd). A small group of **6-spot Ladybirds** had found aphids on a young conifer during the last week of the month. A very early **Red Admiral** butterfly was also here, on the wing for the last three days of the month.

An interesting note came from butterfly conservationist, Roger Norman and Iain Cowe, who received a letter from Ken & Jill Haydock who were looking for **White letter Hairstreak** eggs during the last week of the month in N. Northumberland. They had success, with 5 eggs found in Elm trees by the R. Till at Twizel Bridge (three of the eggs had hatched). Also found were 6 eggs, (3 hatched) by the old mill at Etal Village. Others were found by the R. Glen at Akeld and at Kirknewton.

Flora

Following on from last month early survey, more of our plantlife has burst into growth with the warm conditions. As expected **Lesser Celandine** (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and **Coltfoot** (*Tussalago farfara*) have appeared a week or so early along with the odd **Primrose** (*Primula vulgaris*) flower seen on the cliffs at

Spittal, the railway embankment at Cocklawburn and further inland at Lickar Dene. Most notable for me is the flowering of **Oxlip** (*Primula elatior*) above the footpath along the Tweed, below Mill Farm. These are naturalised from garden origin, as the nearest site of genuine wild Oxlips is Cambridgeshire and the Fens, where they grow in open woodland, much like the embankments here beside the Tweed. They seem to be versatile, as we found them in alpine conditions last year on the summit of Les Rochers de Naye in the Bernese Alps at 2,042 m (6,700 ft), growing in open alpine pasture.

Do please send your records (of anything that strikes you) into Malcolm Hutcheson at: m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com

With many thanks to Malcolm Hutcheson for the above, plus the other recorders.

Butterfly Surveys

For several years the group has conducted surveys of butterflies at Cocklawburn Dunes and Tommy the Miller's Field. Recently a count has started at Hunting Hall farm. These surveys involve walking a fixed path (called a transect) once a month from April to September. The species and number of butterflies seen within an imaginary "box" are counted. The results are sent to Butterfly Conservation who collate them with figures from all over the UK. These surveys have been taking place since 1976 and have made the butterflies of the UK the best studied wildlife in the world. Butterflies are an important indicator of the state of the environment and so our results are significant. Unfortunately 2017 was the last year we surveyed at Tommy the Miller's Field as the undergrowth made the path dangerous. Reports of previous surveys can be seen in the archive section of the Group website. It is hoped reports of more recent surveys will soon join them.

Usually there is a rota of folk joining in the surveys so you don't have to commit to every week. Since the method requires a fair degree of sunshine, and the surroundings are stunningly beautiful taking part is a pleasure. Should anyone wish to become involved, please speak to Molly Hardie, or contact us via eberwickwildlifegroup@gmail.com

Next talk

Mario Ray will speak about the St Abbs Voluntary Marine Reserve
20th March, 7:30 at Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Road, Spittal

Picture gallery

A couple of **harbingers of Spring**: Malcolm Hutcheson's Red Admiral (on *Viburnum tinus*) referred to before, and your editors rather less attractive offering of the efforts of his local frogs. Two curiosities about this. Firstly – as happens every year – the spawn miraculously appears*, a clump at a time – with no warning. This is despite numerous torchlight searches for amorous amphibians. I seem to miss the excitable croakings of the males too.

The other odd thing is that the spawn clumps are all piled up into what seems an unsuitably shallow, drought-prone part of the pond. It is believed frogs do this to minimise losses of the resulting tadpoles to deeper water predators, such as sticklebacks, newts, water beetles, etc. Interestingly, toads lay their strings of spawn, wrapped around water weed and much deeper. Their tadpoles are distasteful to these predators.

*the first clump appeared 20th February



Sanderling - some charming shots taken by Graham White at Little Beach, on 5th February



