

Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. January 2020

We had a great start to the year with a great walk along the Tweed estuary, our aim being a survey of flowering plants but had the bonus of a prolonged feeding display by a dog otter under the Royal Border Bridge and many birds, including our emblem bird, the goldeneye. Thanks to Malcolm for his leadership, although he did struggle to drag us away from the otter!

Our first talk of the year was an interesting update from two members of the Berwick Marine Reserve (BMR) team. Many thanks to Katherine and Genine who gave our group a fascinating presentation confirming what a fantastic array of marine wildlife and habitat we have on our doorstep. The BMR team is involved in a number of surveys, public education and consultaion, along with data collection. Amongst the projects we heard about tagging crabs and lobsters to see how far they travel; monitoring sea water temperature at various depth and locations over a period of time and publishing guides to snorkel trails. For those that missed it, you can try out their virtual reality headset at the reserve base in Eyemouth - diving under the waves without getting wet, what a great idea! See <https://www.facebook.com/events/385392255645776/> for details of their events including a “Cross Border Cove to Goswick” beach clean on Saturday 21st March.

We continue to raise the issue of shellfish harvesting and bait digging at Little Beach and Pier Road area. NIFCA and Natural England are both aware and monitoring the situation. NE are looking at finding a research student who would be interested in getting some hard science based proof of the situation, to back up the wealth of ‘anecdotal’ evidence from members.

Little Beach; The area in question lies within the Northumbria Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Of these designated sites, the Northumbria Coast SSSI has been designated for a number of wading bird species (purple sandpiper, turnstone, sanderling, golden plover, ringed plover and redshank).

Estuary rocks adjacent to Pier Road; This is in the Lower Tweed and Whitadder SSSI.

This is the NIFCA link for commenting and registration for the consultation on ‘Hand gathering, call for information’ <https://www.nifca.gov.uk/about/consultations/>. This is an open-ended consultation, which will be used to look at drawing up byelaws and controls.

You can also register there for notification of other consultations.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather;

The first few days of a new decade have been a continuation of last months weather pattern. Basically, it has been cloudy with little rainfall, with a few sunny days and cool breezes.

Change did come mid-month with the passing of storm ‘Brendon’ to the north west of us. It brought a few days (14th/16th), with strong west winds, clearing skies at night bringing a touch of frost.

All month the daytime temperatures peaked around 9C (48F), the coldest day (18th) reached 4.5C (40C) with the warmest day (22nd) it climbed to a balmy 13C (55F). The final week of the month was mild throughout with a drop in temperature to 4.5C (40F) on the 28th and a frost at night. Another Atlantic front with strong south west winds, pushed the temperature up again by the 31st, with a high of 12.5C. (55F). The only wet spell came overnight on the 9th, with 12.5mm, half an inch of rain falling in a 12

hour period. All in all, it has been a quite bland month with frost only occurring of seven nights. The coldest nights were the 1st, 10th & 19th, when the temperature fell to -2C (28F) and there has been no record of lying snow. The rainfall total for the month, was 24.5mm (0.95 inches), an exceptionally dry month. The only other drier total in the last 25 years was 2006 with a total of 22.1 mm (0.87 inches). The comparison with a decade ago could not be more different, as January 2010 saw a 3 inch layer of snow lasting from the 3rd to the 10th along with severe frost at night. The coldest daytime temperature was -4.5C (24F) on the 8th/9th with the fall at night reaching -10C (14F). After a thaw mid-month, snow returned on the final days of the month.

What a difference a decade makes!! Yet many people are in denial of global warming.

Birds;

A month with unusual weather conditions, with little frost making the wintering birds react a bit differently. Winter passage birds were thin on the ground but Geese and Swans were high in numbers due to the fresh green sward of grass.

A flock of 160 **Fieldfares** and 40+ **Redwings** were in the fields at Horncliffe Mains (2nd). Our Winter Walk along the Tweed (4th) recorded 22 **Goldeneye** under the Royal Border Viaduct and a roost of 88 **Redshank** on Blakestone point.

The gull roost at West Ord held 230 **Common Gulls** (5th) along with 72 **Oystercatcher** and 6 **Curlews**. Waders normally stay on the coast in winter and move upstream in March. Also there were 14 **Goldeneye** and a pair of **Goosanders**. The **Goldeneye** flock on the Tweed seem to be down in number and are divided into smaller groups.

A flock of 52 **Wigeon** and 44 **Teal** were in Yarrow Slake (6th) with a flock of 32 **Mute Swans** in a kale field at Lilliestead, Low Cocklaw. A flock of 21 **Goldeneye** were at new Water Heugh with 24 **Great Black Backed Gulls** in the roost there. A **Red Throated Diver** and a **Little Grebe** were noted on Calot Shad (7th) with 54 **Shags** and 12 **Cormorants** on the roost in Meadow Haven. A blue darvic ring on a leg of a **Cormorant/Shag** found on Little Beach, proved to be a Shag ringed in the nest as a pullus on Inchkeith Island, near the Forth Railway Bridge on the 8th July 2018 and recorded on Little Beach 30 Nov. 2019.

In Spittal Bay (9th) were 2 **Slavonian Grebes**, 9 **Shags** and 4 **Eider** on the high tide. The flock of **Greylag Geese** at Cocklawburn (10th) increased to 136 with 86 **Pink Footed Geese** joining them.

A flock of 12 **Fieldfares** were at Ord Mains Farm (12th) with numbers of **Teal** rising to 44 at Middle Ord. A flock of 30 **Adult** and 12 **immature Whooper Swans** were grazing in a field at Loanend, Horncliffe next to the Honey Farm. A group of 5 **Long tailed Ducks** were seen of Saltpan Rocks, Cocklawburn (14th) along with 8 **Eiders** and 5 **Guillemots**. A party of 4 **Grey Partridge** were at Billylaw, Ord (19th). Waders at Cocklawburn beach (20th), included 14 **Ringed Plover**, 2 **Sanderling**, 2 **Bar Tailed Godwits** and 3 **Turnstone**. On the coastal fields were 146 **Lapwing**, 76 **Curlew**, 210 **Greylag Geese** and 44 **Pink footed Geese**, with 2 drake **Tufted Duck** on the pond. One of our members was surprised to see a single **Brent Goose** feeding with 36 **Oystercatchers** on Tweedmouth Town Green (21st).

A count at Yarrow Slake (25th) included 144 **Greylag Geese**, 92 **Canada Geese**, a drake **Shelduck**, 16 **Teal**, 36 **Goldeneye**, along with 106 **Lapwing**, 18 **Curlew**, 94 **Redshank** and 7 **Grey Herons**. On the same day at New Water Heugh were 58 **Goldeneye**, a pair of **Goosander**, 4 **Wigeon**, 48 **Lapwing**, 52 **Curlew** and a large flock of c.260 **Wood Pigeons**. A pair of **Mistle Thrushes** were at Billylaw (26th). and a flock of 48 **Whooper Swans** at Gainslaw included 18 **Immatures**. A **Chiff-chaff** was seen visiting the feeding station on the new nature trail at East Ord (27th) and was reported visiting a fat ball! A migrant **Woodcock** flew up off the New Road and flew into Tommy the Miller's Field in front of a surprised member of the Group.

Two large flocks of **Common Scoter** were seen, with 360 off Cheswick Black Rocks (30th) and 160 at Saltpan rocks. On the coastal fields were 274 **Greylag Geese**, 96 **Curlew** and a flock of 54 **Twite**. At Saltpan rocks were 6 **Shags**, 2 **Guillemots** and a pair of **Stonechats**.

Mammals;

A group of 4 **Roe Deer** were seen out in the open fields at Lilliestead (19th) and the only **Brown Hare** record came from Billylaw (26th) where two were seen. A male otter was seen feeding under Royal Border Bridge on our 4th January walk.

Other records;

Following our walk looking for native flowers on the 4th, it is of note how many sites with **Snowdrops** (*Galanthus nivalis*) are in full bloom by the end of the month, with a good display at Castle Hills Wood, Pier House copse and Windyhills, Wood, Scremerston.

We need all your records please.

Thank you to all who have sent in records this month.

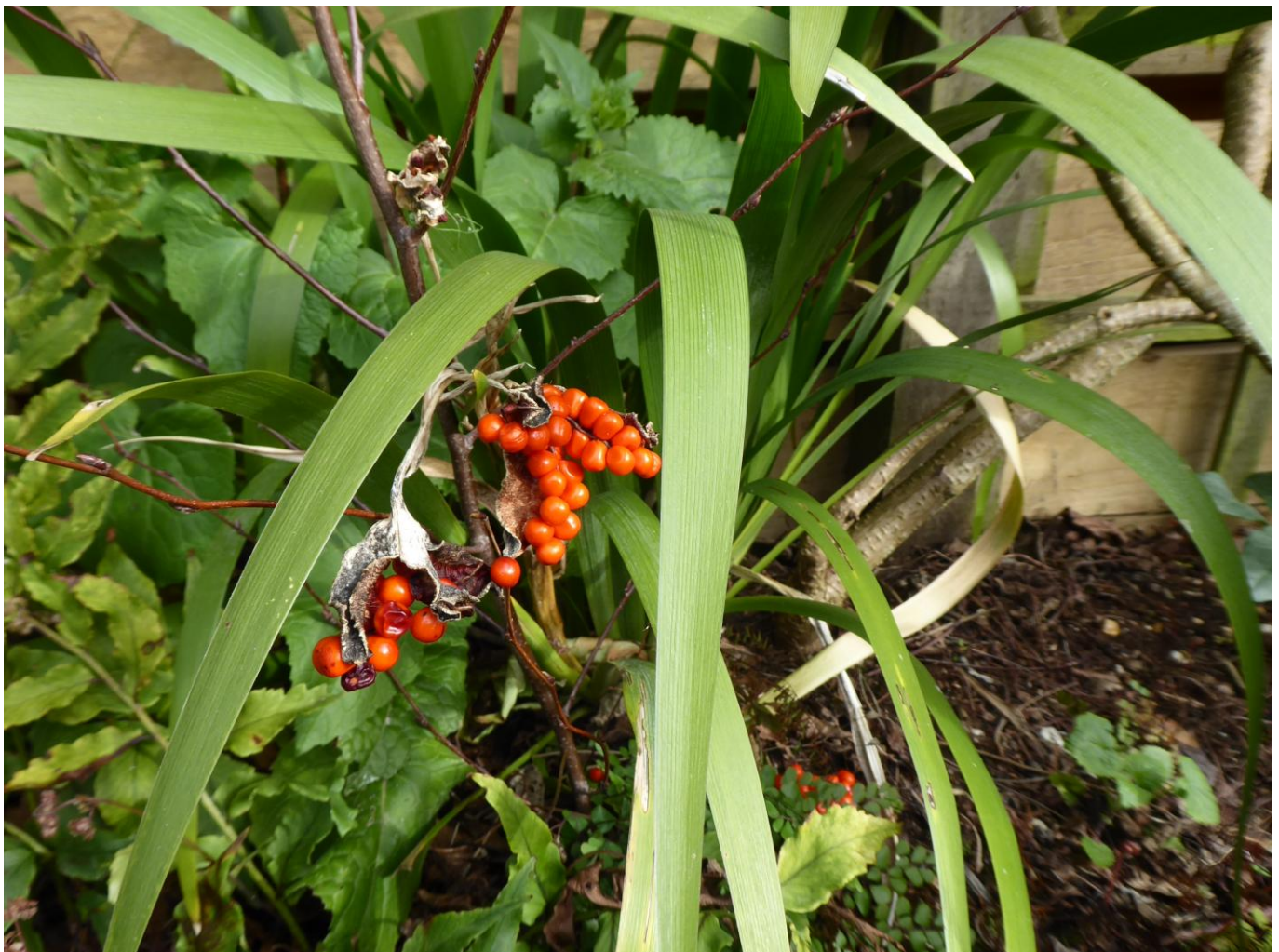
Can members wishing to add their records to the newsletter, send them directly to me by the 30th of each month at sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk or phone 01289 309046.

Alternatively use our form on the Sightings page (www.berwickwildlifegroup.uk)

We also like to see your photos (digital or prints/slides to be scanned).

Separately attached are documents on the sites needed to be covered for the Rookery Survey, (please notify Malcolm if you can help), and a summary of our winter flowering plant walk in January.

Due to compatibility issues these could not be included in the main document.



'Stinking Gladwyn' (*Iris foetidissima*)



Pleas visit our new website and look at our Facebook page for many more great wildlife pictures from members.