

Berwick Wildlife Group

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Facebook; Berwick Wildlife Group

Monthly Review. April 2020

Greetings from a locked down Chairman! I hope you are all keeping safe and well. We are still working on the assumption that we will be able to restart our winter programme of events, so are in the process of booking speakers. Obviously we do not know what the situation will be in the autumn but for now we are working on the principal that we will be able to hold meetings.

Living in a rural location, I am able to get out on the odd occasion without meeting a soul. The Whitadder at Blue Stones Ford is my usual destination, as it is virtually on the doorstep. The colony of sand martins (50+) are back in strength, upstream from the ford and actively digging nest burrows. Let's hope we don't have a floodwater rise, as they are very vulnerable on the outside of a large bend in the river.

The local mute swans are nesting on a very low 'island' but not sitting yet, on the other hand a pair breeding at Millpond Flowers, near Foulden, have cygnets already! The local dippers are nest building on the 'blue stane' cliffs and there is a lot of activity from wagtails, both grey and pied. No sign of kingfishers yet but the sightings are always fleeting when they do happen. Yellowhammers are very evident, as are blackcaps and willow warblers. Orange tip butterflies are much in evidence, kingcups are flowering and the crab apple blossom is magnificent with a carpet of primroses underneath.

Our Apple Tree House resident swifts have yet to return, once they appear we will open the nest boxes that are currently taped up to prevent house sparrow squatters! We can hear skylark singing from the house.

If you are a Facebook user please keep in touch with sightings, news etc.



Swift at Apple Tree House (Simon Wright)

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather; This month has turned out to be a bit of a disappointment for the start of Spring.

The main feature was that it was the first month without any measured rainfall at all, making it the first totally dry month on record since the drought of 1976.

Having said that, the first fortnight started on a warm note, with sunny periods and a soft southwest breeze originating in the Azores. Occasionally the clouds built up to bring a little dampness late in the day, but nothing measurable. The temperature rose to a high of 20C (68F) on the 11th where the mild days came to an end. A cold front brought a change with the wind turning to the north and cold air coming down from the Norwegian Sea. Within two days the day temperature had dropped to a max. of 9C (48F) on the 13th, with dull, overcast conditions for the next five days. Gradually, the pressure rose and with it the cloud level lifting and thinning with settling into a light north-easterly and cold air off the sea with hazy sunshine. Clear skies and sunny days followed on the 21st with the sun lifting the temperature to an average of 54F over the following week. A sea mist brought a cloudy start to the 25th with the sun breaking through by midday, but the nagging cold wind keeping the temperature down.

The following day (26th) saw the wind move round to the north west and in the sunshine the temperature rose to 66F. The threat of rain did come on the very last day of the month with the wind swinging round to the southeast, allowing two cloudy weather fronts to pass through, bringing a spell of dampness and drizzle. A late evening April shower on the 30th did nothing to lift the scale in the rain gauge! A word of caution though, the barometric pressure had dropped to 980 millibars by 6.p.m. and a spell of some rain to come in early May.

So April in the Berwick area, it has been the driest month since the drought of 1976 and in many places it was the sunniest on record.

Frost occurred over three nights the 3rd, 14th and 24th. The coldest night being on the 14th, with the temperature falling to -3.5C (26F) bringing a coat of ice to the birdbath and a 'check' to the plum blossom and early summer bedding plants.

With no rainfall to record, we can only hope some wet days will come in May, as the prospect of a summer drought added to the current restrictions we have with Covid 19 pandemic, will really be a 'pain'.

Birds; With the epidemic 'lockdown', it has made wildlife recording difficult, as we cannot cover all of our usual places we regularly record from. However a number of the members have responded to my request last month and have been sending in there notes each week. Thank you all who have been in touch. Your records show what a diverse place we live in.

The month started with a good movement of migrant **Chiff-chaffs**, with three seen along the new Ord Nature trail (2nd) and other singles in Ord Country Park and down at the Sewage Works. A pair of **Tree Sparrows** were visiting a nest hole in an Ash tree along the Loaning, East Ord (4th) and a migrant male **Blackcap** was in a Ladywell, Tweedmouth garden (5th) with a female seen the following day on Cornhill Road, East Ord. 16 **Canada Geese** flew north over Berwick and 7 **Goldeneye** were still at Clayholes Shiel. A count of eight different Chiff-chaffs were noted around East Ord, must be some sort of a record!!

A party of 5 **Sand Martins** were over Clayholes Shiel early on the 7th, with 18 Canada Geese and a pair of **Greylag Geese** on New water Heugh. A group of 8 **Magpies** were in the Goodie Patch,

Tweedmouth (8th), where two Blackcaps were in song. A pair of **Goldcrests** graced a garden in Springfield Park, East Ord all day (10th) with 7 **Wigeon**, 5 Goldeneye and 3 **Yellowhammers** seen from Toddies Shiel. A pair of **Long tailed Tits** and 8 **Linnets** were seen along the Loaning, East Ord (11th).

A fine 'greenland race' female **Wheatear** was found at the Ord Sewage Works (12th), with a large party of 112 Carrion Crows in a 'parliament' in the centre of a newly sown field there. A Red throated Diver in moulting plumage was seen in Spittal Bay and at the mouth of the

estuary. A **Willow Warbler** was in song at Clayholes Shiel(14th), with a pair of **Bullfinch** seen along the East Ord Nature trail. By mid-morning, a steady northward flow of **Meadow Pipits** was recorded.

An early migrant pair of **Sandwich Terns** were over Calot Shad (15th) with a gathering of 26 **Mute Swans**. A pair of **Stock Doves** were seen along the Loaning, East Ord and a **Greater spotted woodpecker** was drumming in Ord Country Park.

A **Snow Bunting** was tolerating walkers along the Pier (19th) when further along the shore a **Grasshopper Warbler** was 'reeling out' its song on the cliffs at Sharper's Head. This bird stayed around for a few days as it was heard again in gardens along Pier Road. A **Swallow** was hawking over Berwick Golf Course (21st), where a **Tree Pipit** was found with 3 **Skylarks**. A pair of **Siskins** were noted in Flagstaff Park. Another Swallow was seen flying over Tesco's car park.

A **Common Sandpiper** was found feeding under the Lifeboat Station pier (22nd) with a single **Bar tailed Godwit** on Calot Shad. A pair of **Tufted Ducks** were seen at Clayholes Shiel (23rd), with 36 Mute Swans gathering there. A pair of **House Martins** flew round Hiveacres briefly, early on the 24th with a visit to Yarrow Slake seeing a pair of Wigeon, a **Shelduck** and 22 **Redshanks**. A **Garden Warbler** was in song in the wooded surround of the sewage works, with another in song on the waste ground on Etal Road/Hiveacres junction (28th). The following day I found a third in song at the Goodie Patch.

A walk across Sanstell dunes at the Estuary (29th) found a flock of 14 Linnets, 5 **Goldfinches** and a pair of **Reed Buntings**. On Calot Shad were 28 Eider and 8 Sandwich Terns fishing. At New Water Heugh (30th) a low tide roost of 32 Cormorants formed with 12 **Grey Herons** noted along the banks under the wood. At Clayholes Shiel a **Whitethroat** was in song.

Mammals; A single **Brown Hare** was noted on several days in the Yarrow Slake/Sewage Works area throughout the month. Good to see a pod of 4 **Bottle nosed Dolphins** again off Berwick Pier (29th).

Insects; Several more members have sent in a range of records seen from our area.

Butterflies; Two early **Red Admiral** records came from Ladywell, Tweedmouth(15th) and in my own garden here at Cornwall Ave;(24th). The specimen that visited us was very 'tatty' and suggest they have been hibernating locally., something that was not recorded in Northern England 20 years ago!

First dates for the regular species included; **Peacock** (6th) Pier Road, Berwick; **Orange-tip**, (10th) Springfield Park, East Ord; **Small White**, (15th) at Pier Road, New water Heugh and in East Ord.

Green veined whites, (24th) at Yarrow Slake, New water Heugh and Clayholes Shiel. **Large White** (16th) at Clayholes and Toddles Shiels.

Other insects of note, include several records of **Drone Flies** (*Eristalis tenax*) hovering amongst garden flowers. Several species of Bumblebee are on the wing now with **Tree Bumblebee** seen on the 8th in Berwick and East Ord. A **Water Carpet Moth** was photographed on a house wall in Ladywell Tweedmouth (8th) and a **Hawthorn Sheildbug** (*Acanthosoma haemonshoideale*) entered my kitchen in Cornwall Avenue(9th).

Other records; Local Flora: I recorded a small group of **Leopardsbane** (*Doronicum pardalianches*) growing in a baggy ditch under the A1 road on the Loaning, East Ord. We found a large plant of this scarce perennial in the Dowper Bur, Cocklawburn two years ago. Another plant in flower is the **Golden Saxifrage** (*Chrysplenium oppositifolium*). This small, creeping plant of damp shade is putting on a fine show of sulphur green/yellow flowers on the banks of Clayholes Shiel, East Ord.



Orange tip butterfly (Malcolm Hutcheson)

Thank you to all who have sent in records this month. Can members wishing to add there records to the newsletter, send them to sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk or directly to me by the 30th of each month at m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com

We need all your records please.



Hawthorn shieldbug (Malcolm Hutcheson)