

# Berwick Wildlife Group



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## Monthly Review. May 2020

### WILDLIFE REPORTS.

#### From your 'shielding' Chairman!

I hope you are all safe and well.

Firstly, my apologies for the late arrival of this newsletter, entirely down to communication difficulties!

Restrictions are gradually lifting, so if you are able, I hope you can get out to enjoy the wonderful wildlife at this time of year. Of course being 'over the border' I am under a slightly different regime.

I have managed some short walks in a suitably isolated spot close to us on the Whitadder: nesting mute swan, dipper's nest now on a second brood, otters on the trail camera and many spp. of warbler. Also a large flock of goosander a couple of weeks ago. There are 2 pairs of oyster catcher nesting somewhere on the shingle.

At home our nest box blue tits have fledged, we have a visiting family of newly fledged great tits, many blackbirds (keep digging up my vegetable seeds!) plus numerous house sparrows and dunnocks. We have had one sighting of a tree sparrow. Our swifts are sitting on three eggs in the box with the camera in and we think probably in at least one more occupied box of the 5 on the gable end. On the river the sand martin colony is thriving with 50 plus nests, they should be feeding young now. Fingers crossed for no sudden rise in the river level as happened in 2019.

On a safety issue I have been in contact with the Tweed Forum, who are actively controlling invasive plant species at present in the wider Tweed catchment. If you spot giant Hogweed, balsam or skunk cabbage, please report to them at: [info@tweedforum.org](mailto:info@tweedforum.org), including a grid reference and photo if possible.

Of course do not touch the hogweed, as the sap is dangerous to the skin when exposed to sunlight, causing very painful rash and blistering.

We are busy booking speakers for our new season, including; Nicky Hume Treescapes Project Officer from the Border Forest Trust, Shaun Hackett on bumble bees, David Steel from the Isle of May, Flexigraze and possibly Tony Lightley from Forestry and Land Scotland again on another bird project. This all of course is subject to the situation progressing in the right direction.

Simon

**Weather;** Following a month without rain, May at least brought some relief with some wet spells, mainly overnight.

Temperatures reached around normal for the time of year, although a cold wind from a northerly direction coming off a cold North Sea, tempered the sunshine during the first 14 days. Overnight rain in the form of showers came on four nights, but a change in the wind direction on the 17<sup>th</sup> to a mild south-westerly saw the daytime temperature rise to a warm 23C (74F) on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

The following week saw spells of scattered showers and sunny spells. A very deep area of low pressure passed along the north coast of Scotland for a 48 hour period on the 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup>. It brought two days of gale

force winds with gusts up to 50m.p.h. This out of season feature ripped through the tree canopy, scattering a layer of light green over the ground. By the 25<sup>th</sup> (Bank holiday Monday) a clear cloudless day saw the temperature rise to 32.9C (75F) by mid afternoon. The bright sunny days continued to the end of the month, with a day (29<sup>th</sup>) when the wind changed to a warm southerly and rocketed the temperature to 26.5C (80F). The sea breeze dominated the final three days of the month, tempering the heat and bringing sea mists early and late off the sea.

The Met Office has reported this spring as being the sunniest on record. As for us around Berwick, May has added to the last three dry months and to the possibility of a summer drought with all its difficulties, an added distraction to our current restrictions. Hopefully a little rain will come in June to help our crops and gardens.

Total Rainfall figures for May were: 26.5mm (1.05 inches).

**Birds;** A slight easing of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions on the 14<sup>th</sup> May, allowed us to travel further afield for our daily exercise, without a timescale. This meant we could resume visits to our local sites with care, but recognising the social distancing rules, which just about allowed us to return to our regular recording process.

The main spring migration is in 'full' swing' and changes in bird populations and the herbage growth is noticeable, allowing nesting success or failure to be observed.

At Yarrow Slake (2<sup>nd</sup>) were 28 **Curlew**, 6 **Oystercatchers** and a **Dunlin**. Two **House Martins** were over the Sewage Works and pair of **Wigeon** and 16 **Cormorants** in the low tide roost.

A single **Swift** was over Ord House (3<sup>rd</sup>) with a **Whitethroat** and a pair of **Reed Buntings** at Springfield Park, East Ord. A pair of **Longtailed Tits** were feeding young at Clayholes Sheil. A **Cuckoo** was calling in the Kyles Hills (4<sup>th</sup>) just south of our recording area.

A gathering group of 132 **Mute Swans** were at New water Heugh (7<sup>th</sup>) with 6 **Goosander**. Three pairs of **Sedge Warblers** were on territory at the Loaning, East Ord, with another 2 Swifts seen overhead.

A gathering of 180 hirundines, were over the Tweed at West Ord (13<sup>th</sup>), temporary stopped in migration by poor weather conditions. Amongst them were c.35 House Martins. A **Mallard** was noted with 8 ducklings and 8 **Tree Sparrows** were in the hedgerow. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was still 'reeling' his song in the rough grass south of the Coastwatch Tower, Berwick.

The first visit to Cocklawburn (15<sup>th</sup>) in 10 weeks found 4 pairs of **Tufted Duck** on the pond with a **Bar tailed Godwit** on the pond edge. At West Ord (17<sup>th</sup>) there was a male **Shelduck**, and a roost of 184 **Herring Gulls** and 32 **Black headed Gulls**. A cold sea breeze (19<sup>th</sup>) found 2 immature **Little Gulls** feeding at West Ord over the Tweed. At Cocklawburn (20<sup>th</sup>), was a fine male **Wheatear** of the Greenland race, 12 Tufted Duck and an immature male **Goldeneye** were on the pond.

An unseasonal westerly gale on the 22<sup>nd</sup> recorded c.25 **Gannets** sheltering in Spittal Bay and feeding close to the shore, whilst at the Calot Shad 18 **Sandwich Terns** were fishing over the Estuary and 140 Mute Swans had now gathered.

At Middle Ord pond (24<sup>th</sup>) were a pair of **Greylag Geese** with 6 goslings and a pair of **Coots** with 3 juveniles, with a single **Little Grebe**. A Sedge Warbler was in full song in the centre of a flowering rape field at Scremerston Station (25<sup>th</sup>) with a **Mistle Thrush** feeding in the mole hills and a Whitethroat on the Spittal cliffs footpath.

The annual breeding seabird count was done at Needles Eye (26<sup>th</sup>). Numbers were a little lower than last year, but this remains an important site in our 'domain'. Sadly, no House Martins were recorded with cliff nests this year. Along the railway embankment were noted a pair of breeding Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler and two pairs of Reed Buntings.

At Cocklawburn (28<sup>th</sup>) were 34 **Eider** and 3 **Turnstone** all in Summer Plumage. A flock of 19 Greylag Geese flew north with a later flock of 18 **Canada Geese** flying north over the sea. A further flock of 58 Greylag Geese were seen flying north over Spittal cliffs (29<sup>th</sup>) with 10 **Linnets** also there. A flock of 6 **Tree Sparrows** were at Borewell Farm.

The single **Ring necked Parakeet** was again seen flying into Ord Country Park (30<sup>th</sup>) - does it have a nest somewhere locally? Finally on the last day of Spring (31<sup>st</sup>), a superb male **Hobby** was seen hunting

insects over the Tweed at West Ord. As the bird circled higher and over Paxton House woods, it made several swoops at the local **Sand Martins**.

**Mammals;** Single **Brown Hares** have been recorded at Billylaw, West Ord and Cocklawburn Beach dunes. I woke up early (5.30a.m.) on the 13th and was surprised to see a hind **Roe Deer** in Cornwall Avenue amongst the parked cars attempting to jump the wall into the Ord Country Park. I can only assume she had given birth to a kid in there as it is closed with the Coronavirus epidemic. A **Vixen** was barking loudly at Scremerston Town Farm woods early on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Insects;**

Butterflies; Numbers of 'whites' have been steady with records of **Orange tips** coming from a wider area. A possible sighting of a **Brimstone** came from Ladywell, Tweedmouth (25<sup>th</sup>). It follows a pattern in recent years. This rare migrant probably has been following the 'green highway' of the railway with its shrub cover and blackthorn food plants, from the Tyneside area, where it is a scarce resident. Oddly, Brimstone was recorded last in 2014 in Tweedmouth by the railway. A steady flow of **Small Tortoiseshells** and **Peacocks** were on favourable sites with a **Red Admiral** seen at New water Heugh (21<sup>st</sup>), but no sightings of Painted Lady yet!

Six **Small Heath**s were seen at the usual site of the 'pit' on Cocklawburn dunes (21<sup>st</sup>) with four on a new site, Spittal cliffs on 29<sup>th</sup>. More positive is the good number of **Wall Brown**, with 8 along the Cow Road Spittal (21<sup>st</sup>), 5 at New water Heugh (25<sup>th</sup>), 6 at Needles Eye (26<sup>th</sup>) and 8 along Spittal Cliffs (29<sup>th</sup>). A **Cinnabar Moth** was on the wing there also. A **Small Copper** was seen on the Goody Patch, Tweedmouth (29<sup>th</sup>).

#### **Other records**

Thank you to all who have sent in records this month. Can members wishing to add their records to the newsletter, send them to [sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk](mailto:sightings@berwickwildlifegroup.uk) or directly to me by the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month at [m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com](mailto:m.hutcheson08@btinternet.com)

**We need all your records please.**



Giant Hogweed (Tweed Forum)



Whitethroat (Simon Wright)



And finally one of Anita's wonderful images from her Facebook posting!