

Berwick Wildlife Group



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Monthly Review. August 2020

Welcome to our delayed newsletter.

Monthly meetings postponed until further notice

The most important news is that the prospect of any indoor meetings before the end of the year has been finally eliminated by the 'rule of 6' announced this week. Thank you to all those who replied last months request for opinions on attending meetings if arranged.

Out here in Chirnside, we have watched the farmers racing to get the harvest in between bouts of rain. Fortunately the storm flows did not affect the local riverside sand martin colony, which succeeded in raising a second brood. The mute swans also fledged 2 cygnets and we think the local dippers had a second brood as well.

The Apple Tree House swifts are long gone. The final tally was 3 broods, with one, two and three successfully fledged chicks. It is such a privilege to have such an intimate insight into their breeding. A young swift doing yoga and wing press-ups is a sight to behold!

We will find more ways to keep in touch over the next few months, meanwhile do keep an eye on the Berwick Dolphin Watch site for news of the very active pods around at the moment. Also keep sightings coming in and visit the BWG Facebook page if you use it.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather; This month's weather started pleasant enough, with some sunny days and some with showers and warm temperatures. High pressure brought settled conditions through to the 16th when the jet stream unusually moved to the south of the UK. This led to a sequence of low-pressure cell, travelling across the south of the Atlantic to our shores.

The first low pressure front came on the 17th, bringing a wet day with spells of heavy showers which were slow moving due to light winds. This was the remnant of tropical storm 'Layla' bringing a rainfall total of 30.5 mm (1.2 inches) over a 24 hour period. This set of a pattern of vigorous, low-pressure fronts, bringing heavy rain and strong winds over a short period of time.

The first of these storms was named 'Ellen' by the Irish Met Office, which passed up the west side of the UK on the 20th, did not effect us, except for just a few sharp showers reaching Berwick. The main feature for us was the gale-force southwest winds the following day, with a large drop of barometric pressure to 984 millibars and ironically in blue sunny skies. The pressure quickly recovered the next day, with the next few days of sunshine and showers, with cool nights.

The next storm named 'Francis' came straight over Ireland, Northern England/Southern Scotland regions. The 25th saw another day of strong winds falling calm, as the 'eye' of the low pressure crossed over us with another drop in barometric pressure to 984 millibars. Again steady rain persisted over a 24 hour period. This time the system had a bit of a 'sting in the tail' with a small developing low pressure forming on its flank, as the cool north-east wind rose again it rained most of the day on the 26th.

High pressure settled the last days of the month although with chilly nights. The temperature fell to 42F overnight on the 30th. Rainfall total of 93.5mm (3.7 inches) was a bit higher than the average for August.

Birds; As August progressed, so the build up of Autumn migration was notable. The first birds to go were the local **Swifts**, which had all left Berwick by the 8th. A **Grey Wagtail** and 15 **Teal** were at New water Heugh (1st) with 3 **Common Snipe** and a **Common Sandpiper** seen at West Ord(2nd) where there was a large roost of 186 **Black headed Gulls** and 84 **Common Gulls**. A further 212 Black headed Gulls were in the near-by harvested field. A fine adult **Osprey** made a 10 minute visit at the same site (5th) before drifting south westwards. This was the day when a very large number of feral **Greylag Geese** arrived in our area, with 680 birds on the saltmarsh at New water Heugh along with 56 **Canada Geese**.

A visit to Cocklawburn (6th) found a male **Wheatear** with the local **Stonechat** family. 72 **Lapwing** were in the fields and a fine **Greenshank** on the coast. The first waders to return to Little Beach were 2 **Ringed Plover**, 2 **Dunlin** and a **Turnstone** on the (10th), with a **Whimbrel** noted at Cocklawburn. The roost in Meadow Haven held 12 **Cormorants** and 16 **Shags** with 14 **Eider** on the sea. On the estuary were 16 **Goosander** over the Calot Shad. A flock of 94 Lapwing had returned to the fields at Cocklawburn (11th), where a notable group of 34 **House Martins** were feeding over the pond. A flock of 6 **Grey Partridge** were seen near Sea House.

A visit to Lickar Dene(12th) noted 4 **Bullfinches** and a family group of 5 **Chiff-chaffs**. In the newly ploughed fields were c.400 **Herring Gulls** and c.1400 Black headed Gulls. A group of 32 **Sand Martins** had gathered at West Ord with a party of 68 Canada Geese. The 'summering' **Whooper Swan** was seen at New water Heugh with 4 **Little Egrets**.

Migrant numbers were building up with, 168 Goosander at Calot Shad (14th) with 4 **Common Terns** and a group of 26 **Swallows** 'hawking' over the rising tide.

Little Egret numbers on the Estuary had risen to 9 at Yarrow Slake(16th). A Common Sandpiper was at West Ord (20th), with the Canada Geese flock rising to 166 and 68 Greylag Geese in the fields at Gainslaw House. The shoreline at Little Beach(21st) held 68 **Oystercatchers**, 9 Ringed Plover, 42 Dunlin, 22 **Curlew** and 4 **Rock Pipits**. They were all rudely alarmed by a male **Merlin** which tried to 'pick off' a Dunlin without success. A group of 7 Teal had returned to Middle Ord pond(23rd), with c.680 Black headed Gulls and 160 Common Gulls in the gull roost at West Ord.

Storm 'Francis' brought gale force winds from the north-east(25th) and an unusually large group of mixed terns into the Estuary for shelter. They included 130 **Arctic Terns**, 80 Common Terns, 3 **Roseate Terns** and 54 **Sandwich Terns**. A testing skill for tern identification required. Also in the gull roost were 236 **Kittiwakes** and 24 **Great b b Gulls**. In Tweedmouth Dock were 260 **Mute Swans**.

A large flock of 86 **Goldfinches** were at Cocklawburn(27th) feeding on Hardheads seed along with a flightier group of 52 Linnets. Both the duck **Gadwall** and **Goldeneye** were still on the pond. A **Whitethroat** was with 4 **Yellowhammers** at Billy law(30th)n and a single **Swift** was feeding over the Tweed at West Ord with 4 **Sand Martins**. The arrival of a female **Peregrine** over Hiveacres 'raised the alarm' with the local gulls and pigeons.

A high tide count at Yarrow Slake (31st), recorded 14 Grey Heron, 7 Little Egrets, 11 Cormorants, 420 Lapwings, a **Ruff**, a **Black tailed Godwit**, 94 Curlew, 254 Redshank and a pair of Greylag Geese.

Mammals; It was a little disappointing to record two separate **Grey Squirrel** sightings on my local 'circuit' yesterday (30th). One in the lane at Middle Ord getting fallen acorns and the other came out of the hedge at the cattle grid at West Ord, and ran down the field towards the Tweed. They possibly came from the woodland at Longlands School and have made use of less human disturbance due to the Covid restrictions.

Several **Otter** sightings have been made at West Ord, under the A1 bypass bridge at East Ord and around the Royal Border bridge area. A single **Roe Deer** hind was seen in fields at Gainslaw House (2nd) and a **Brown Hare** was seen in the dunes at Cocklawburn (11th), rather a strange place to be!!

Insects; I have attached a photo taken by my neighbour of a **Elephant Hawk Moth** caterpillar. It was in an Elder bush along the Cow Road at Eastcliffe. Its been a good month for migrant **Silver 'Y'** moths often seen in gardens at dusk as well in daylight an our coastal sites.

We had a good sighting of a **Migrant Hawker** dragonfly (*Aeshna mixta*) at Cold Burn, Allerdean (11th) hawking a woodland edge away from any water.

Butterflies; It has been an average month for most species, with a good showing of **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Wall Brown**. **Red Admiral** have been a bit scarce and **Painted Lady** almost 'non-existent', a vivid contrast to the large numbers last year. Numbers of **Common Blue**, and **Speckled Wood** were a bit thin, though an increase in **Small Skipper** records was pleasing. Lets hope a mild, dry September will bring a bit of joy to the autumn.

Other records

Cetaceans; One again the pod of 12-14 **Bottle nosed Dolphins** were seen regularly throughout the month from the Pier and south along Spittal Bay. A large count of 16 was made at Saltpan rocks, Cocklawburn (8th).

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.



Puss Moth caterpillar (Malcolm Hutcheson)



Carline Thistle, Cocklawburn (Simon Wright)