
Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. October 2020

Welcome to a slightly delayed newsletter.

Malcolm's report is particularly full this month, a sign of the seasonal changes. Thank you Malcolm for your excellent recording, please do continue to send in your sightings to the contact below.

My own patch in Chirnside is seeing many changes, especially in the garden. Having upgraded our somewhat tired bird feeders, we are being eaten out of house and home by large numbers of coal tits. They don't hang about at the feeder, once they have chosen a sunflower seed they like (having rejected many onto the ground) they are off like a shot to a perch to open and eat the seed. We have at least a pair of nuthatches visiting every day, as well as the usual great and blue tits. House sparrows were less in evidence but have now discovered the suet balls, so they won't last long! Surprisingly, we have not seen any goldfinches (or siskins yet), even though goldfinches nested in the willow arch this year. The niger seed is out and waiting! Slight excitement this morning as I had a rare (for our garden) sighting of a tree sparrow. Many skeins of geese are passing over on their way to and from a roost, including on our Friday evening trip to Fast Castle (Dowlaw), which yielded approx. 60 seal pups on the beach. SWT are trialling online talks which if available we will post on Facebook and email. Keep safe, Simon.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather; A succession of stormy weather fronts with sunny days in between, are the 'norm' for October. This year it has been true to form, only conditions have been ramped up by a stronger jet stream speeding them up.

It has been a wet month indeed a record was broken on the 3rd, as following storm 'Alex' it was recorded as the wettest day on record for the U.K. Some areas in Wales and the West Country recorded a deluge but the average across the country that day was 31.7mm (1.25 inches), beating the 29.8mm (1.17 inches) which fell on the 25th August 1986.

Around Berwick there was steady rain for two days bringing a total of 45.5mm (1.8 inches) with all of that falling on the 3rd.

The following week brought mild, sunny conditions with a light NW wind. The wind gradually brought showers by the 10th and a full days rain on the 12th. A spell of strong NE winds from the 13th, brought a fall in temperature. High seas along the coast came with a good passage of storm blown sea birds.

Conditions changed back to sunshine and showers and a return to a NW wind each day up to the 21st, when it turned back to a mild south westerly raising the temperature to 62F. A spell of heavy overnight rain followed this weather front, the remnants of Spanish storm 'Barbara'.

The last ten days of the month were to see the passage of to ex-hurricanes passing up the Atlantic sending some of their fronts, wind and rain to our shores. Ex-hurricane 'Epsilon' moved up the coast towards Iceland on the 27th, with a 24 spell of strong winds and a band of rain. Finally storm 'Aiden'

came on the 31st. with a mild start to the day. The wind built up through the day and after a spell of heavy rain at noon, cleared with the strengthening wind. The forecast is for ex-hurricane 'Zeta' to have its influence tomorrow, but that will be the start of next months bulletin!

Only an air frost was recorded on the 2nd, when the temperature fell 1.5C (35F) but no ground frost was recorded through the month. The total rainfall for the month was 105 mm (3.8 inches).

Birds; With migration in full swing, October has seen the last of the Summer migrants depart and winter visitors coming, on some days in good numbers. **Pink footed Geese** have been on the move almost every day. Along with this, the variable conditions with autumn gales bringing spells of good seabird movement in between the calm days and the chance of coming across a scarcer visitor.

At Little Beach (1st) there was a high tide disturbing the piles of wrack on the beach attracting 104 **Turnstone**, 15 **Dunlin**, 4 **Purple Sandpiper** and a smart Greenland race **Wheatear**. On Meadow Haven were 2 **Black throated Divers** with 4 **Guillemots** and a group of 15 **Wigeon**. The following saw a migrant flock of c.20 **Chaffinch** in the trees behind the Tennis Courts with 2 **Chiff-chaffs**.

A group of 18 **Teal** were on Middle Ord pond (4th) with 220 **Lapwing** at New water Heugh and 2 **Common Snipe**. At East Ord 3 **Redwings** were noted and more thrushes later in the day in Flagstaff Park, with c16 **Blackbirds**, 6 redwings and 4 **Mistle Thrushes** feeding on the ripening whitebeam berries. The late afternoon saw a passage of 480 **Barnacle Geese**, in three skeins, flying south giving their 'barking' calls. A late **Willow Warbler** and 2 chiff-chaffs were seen in the trees behind St.Helens Terrace in Spittal (5th) with a male **Sparrow Hawk** hunting over the Goodie Patch, Tweedmouth.

Cocklawburn (6th) also had movements of smaller birds, with c.18 **Skylark** and 8 **Reed Buntings**, while overhead a very large passage of pink footed geese came off the sea. A total of 1,300 birds in 8 skeins, all heading west.

Yet more large numbers of Pinkfeet (c.1,200) were heading south over Berwick (8th) with a fine **Yellow browed Warbler** in the scrub behind the Tennis Courts with another late willow warbler. The afternoon saw 4 **Coal Tits**, 8 **Long tailed Tits** and 2 chiff-chaffs in Tommy the Miller's field near Castle Hills.

A group of 28 **Cormorant** were in Calot Shad (9th) with a late Immature **Sandwich Tern** in the gull roost.

A group of 3 **Fieldfare** were in Ord Country Park (10th) and 4 **Goldeneye** had returned to West Ord the following day.

A stormy day (13th) brought 14 **Red throated Divers**, 5 **Guillemots** and a **Razorbill** into Spittal Bay, with a strong passage of 1,650/hour **Gannets**, 420/hour guillemots and 300/hour **Kittiwakes**, all flying north.

The following day the wind was still strong and 4 **Arctic Skuas**, 5 Red throated Diver, 24 **Wigeon**, 26 **Eider** and 14 **Common Scoter** were noted passing north passed Berwick pier.

At Cocklawburn (15th) were 218 lapwing, 35 golden plover and 65 **Curlew**. At dusk, a noisy **Ring necked Parakeet** was seen with a group of **Jackdaws** going to roost over East Ord. A drake **Pintail** was with **Mallard** and 2 teal in Yarrow Slake (16th) with a **Little Egret** and a male **Grey Wagtail** seen near Chateaux Pedro. A flock of 42 common scoter were offshore at Cheswick Black rocks with 2 **Ravens** passing south overhead.

Early morning (22nd) saw 16 barnacle geese over Hiveacres, heading up the Tweed with 5 whooper swans at the same time two days later. The newly sown fields above Murton Crags (25th) recorded 185 golden plover and 32 lapwing. Two **Little Grebes** and 7 goldeneye were at West Ord with a single whooper swan. A **Slavonian Grebe** and 12 red throated divers were in Spittal bay, while at Little Beach good numbers of waders on the high tide included, 52 dunlin, 22 **Sanderling**, 118 **Redshank** and 58 turnstone. A large roost of 35 shag and 12 cormorants were on the roost in Meadow Haven (26th) near the Pier.

A fascinating morning at Cocklawburn (27th) saw several large flocks of golden plover merge and spiral upwards containing some 1,200 birds. Also 226 lapwing were with them. A flock of 'bugleing' whooper swans came in off the sea and headed west. Small birds were present too, with 3 redwings, 18 **Goldfinch**, 6 **Twite** and 8 reed buntings - it was a right time, right place morning!

Mammals; Yet more **Grey Squirrel** sightings have been seen this month. Can I ask members if you see one, please contact of Red Squirrel Alert or Northumberland Wildlife Trust who will need to know, **date, time and place (grid ref;)** of your sighting as soon as possible through Eric & Heather Wood at <heatherwood168@btinternet.com>. I have been assured by the RSA that they will remove them humanely.

Insects; An unexpected visitor in the shape of a mature **Giant House Spider** (*Eratigena atrica*) appeared from under my armchair, early evening on the 8th. Dashing from under one seat to another, they have been recorded at running at half a metre a second! It became a distraction for a couple of evenings. Then, four days later I got up in the morning to find him dead on the kitchen floor. This spider regularly comes out in our houses in October as the males are looking for a mate. Unfortunately, when he finds one they rarely survive as the female kills him once his 'purpose' has been completed.

Butterflies; October usually sees the last butterflies of the season, with mild conditions occasionally seeing the odd one survive into November. **Red Admirals** may well do that this year as I have one still coming to my autumn buddleia (29th). My final sightings in the garden are; Peacock (7th) Large White and Speckled Wood (8th); Small Tortoiseshell (9th) and Small White (10th). Please send me any November records you may get.

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 14 was made in Cocklawburn Bay (27th) along with 4 **Common Dolphins** riding the surf on the incoming tide.

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.

