
Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. November 2020

Chairman's piece!

I hope another month of a Covid-19 affected life finds you well.

We are sad to hear that the United Reformed Church in Spittal, where we have been having meetings has taken the decision to close. A local group is considering a plan to purchase it as a community asset. As a Group we have registered our support for this venture. We have been looking at possible more central venues for meetings, so this will make the process more urgent for when we can resume indoor meetings in the future. If anyone would like to do so personally then this is the contact:

Mike Greener - 07752403409

Email: mikegreener84@gmail.com

As some of you know, I am a member of 'Save our Squirrels Berwick Group' and active in controlling the grey population. With winter setting in there is more opportunity for control as food becomes scarcer. The group's purpose is to protect the vulnerable but strong nationally important nucleus in North Northumberland. The core population is in the Kylee Woods Red Squirrel Reserve and surrounding area, which extends as far as Bamburgh to the East and Ford and Etal in the North.

Within the Kylee Reserve there has been an increase of reds this year with 70 out of the 90 feeders there visited by reds, total numbers are of course difficult to quantify but there has been an increase in the numbers and spread of reds.

The group as a whole has removed 752 greys in the year to end September. Since the group was formed in 2012 over 4400 greys have been removed!

Although there are very few sightings of reds north of the Tweed, four of us are trapping greys to limit incursion into the areas where reds are present. This autumn we seem to be experiencing a rise in numbers of greys and in their average weight, so they must have had a good summer!

Malcolm has been reporting increased sightings of greys in the Berwick area, so please pass sightings on to him, myself or to SOSBG.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather; A succession of storms from the Mid Atlantic brought a rotation of strong winds and blustery showers for the first few days of the month, followed by quieter, more settled conditions from mid-month on.

The first three days saw the passing of the remnants of ex-hurricane 'Zeta', bringing us strong south-westerly winds up to gale-force, with spells of heavy rain. A short quiet spell between the 3rd and 11th, saw us enjoy some winter sunshine with early morning mists and fog over the Tweed. By the 13th, the next warm front passed through bringing a fresh wind from the south and some overnight rain.

On the 17th, a gusty south wind brought warm tropical maritime air up from southern Europe with the temperature rising to 60F by dawn the next day. During the 18th the temperature fell away again by 10 degrees to a more natural level.

Cooler, quiet conditions followed for the next 10 days, some with winter sunshine and cold nights, other overcast and grey with local mists forming. A slight frost occurred over the three nights of 26th-28th.

Rainfall has been low over the month, with 27mm (1.4 inches) recorded. This is well below the 2.75 inches average recorded over the last 10 years. Light frosts occurred on six nights only.

Birds; November is notable for movements of our winter visitors and some migration from Northern Europe according to weather conditions. This was notable at the start of the month, with 4 **Whooper Swans** and 18 **Goldeneye** at West Ord (1st), a wandering party of Tits which included 5+ **Goldcrests** feeding in the trees at Powder Magazine on the Walls, near Flagstaff Park (2nd). Not far away were a flock of 12 **Goldfinches** feeding near Pier House.

Pink footed Geese have been seen almost every day moving between roost points around Holy Island and the feeding grounds in the Borders. A skein of 74 **Barnacle Geese** were seen at Cocklawburn (5th) as they flew north, giving there barking, dog-like calls. At Yarrow Slake (6th) were 76 **Greylag Geese** and 130 **Canada Geese**, most birds moving on by the next day. The slopes of Tommy the Miller's Fields saw a large group of thrushes with 22 **Blackbirds**, 8 **Redwings**, 4 **Song Thrushes** and a group of 7 **Bullfinches**. Interestingly, the same day saw an influx of the Northern race of Bullfinch along the East Coast. These Scandinavian variants are much bolder and brighter than the British race and are often quite tame as they come from Arctic tundra regions where humans are scarce!! On Calot Shad were 24 **Cormorants**, 5 **Goldeneye**, a pair of **Red breasted Mergansers** and 2 **Little Grebes**.

A covey of 15 **Grey Partridge** were West Ord (8th) with 9 **Goldeneye** and 34 **Goldfinch** at New water Heugh. A **Woodcock** was seen flying over the Golf Course from Flagstaff Park (9th), a probable migrant from Russia! A **Grey Plover** was on Cocklawburn beach (12th), with 5 **Ringed Plover** and 12 **Turnstone**. In the coastal fields were 158 **Lapwing**, 34 **Golden Plover** and 64 **Curlew**. Off Saltpan rocks were a drake **Long tailed Duck** with 36 **Common Scoter** and 2 **Red throated Divers**.

A flight of 14 **Redwing** passed over Cornwall Avenue (14th) westwards, with 64 **Fieldfares** down the road in the Ord Industrial Estate. A large flock of c260 **Wood Pigeons** were feeding in a field of brussel sprouts at Murton Craggs (15th) with 16 **Fieldfare** also there in the trees. A flock of 122 **Wigeon** had gathered at New water Heugh along with 260 **Lapwing**.

A group of 46 **Pink footed Geese** were in the coastal fields at Cocklawburn (17th), where 8 **Meadow Pipits** and 3 **Stonechats** were present. A party of 14 **Whooper Swans** were seen flying south over Spittal Bay. At Murton Craggs (22nd) a flock of 146 **Golden Plover** had gathered on the highest fields. The re-appearance of the **Ring necked Parakeet** over Ord Country Park (23rd) was not too unexpected.

Stormy conditions on the 24th brought a sea movement with 60 **Guillemots** an hour flying south over Spittal Bay, along with 7 **Gannets** and a drake **Shelduck**. On the Bay were 9 **Red throated Divers** and 5 **Guillemots**. In Calot Shad were 68 **Mallard**, and 2 **Red throated Divers**.

A group of 32 **Sanderling**, 6 **Ringed Plover**, 8 **Purple Sandpipers** and 12 **Turnstone** were on Cocklawburn Beach (26th). Near-by off Saltpan rocks were a fine pair of **Velvet Scoter**, with 18 **Common Scoter**, an immature drake **Long tailed Duck** and 4 **Guillemots**. Overhead flew 744 **Pinkfeet**, in 3 skeins, southwards.

A **Slavonian Grebe** appeared in Spittal Bay (27th) at the end of the promenade along with 3 **Guillemot** and 4 **Shag**. In Tweedmouth, a **Great spotted Woodpecker** was seen visiting feeders in Riverdene, while a **Water Pipit** was reported on the feeding on the piers of Royal Border Bridge. Recorded by a regular birdwatcher, care must be taken in identifying the difference between **Water Pipit** and the

Scandinavian race of Rock Pipit, both of which have been recorded on the Tweed Estuary. A flock of c65 Golden Plover were seen at Cocklawburn.

Still at Cocklawburn (29th), a pair of adult Long tailed Ducks were at Middle Skerr, along with 3 **Black throated Divers**. Family parties of this diver used to be regular along our shore. At Murton White House, a group of 3 **Coal Tits** flew out of the hedge along with a **Treecreeper**. At Middle Ord pond there were a pair of **Mute Swans** and 8 **Teal**. Winter thrushes were feeding in the hawthorns at West Ord with 54 Redwing and 18 Fieldfares seen. A flock of 42 Goldeneye had gathered at New Water Heugh.

Avian Flu alert.

The carcass of a dead Whooper Swan was found on the Whiteadder earlier this week. I have been alerted by Andrew Craggs of English Nature that you should report any large bird corpses found to him, as a case of Avian Flu has been recorded in North Yorkshire and we should take care in not touching anything found, (see further info above).

Mammals; Still the odd **Grey Squirrel** is being recorded in the Berwick area. As recorded last month, all sighting should go to Red Squirrel Alert.

Insects; No notable records this month.

Other records;

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.

A good response this month, so keep it up! – Simon



Photo: Nicholas Box (SOSBG)

Below is a communication from NEBBS re avian influenza.

Dear Surveyors,

I understand two pale-bellied brent geese corpses from Lindisfarne (North Northumberland, coast of northeast England) have been identified with avian influenza in recent days.

Therefore I suggest for the time being we exercise caution with respect to (handling) beached birds. Please continue to report corpses to me.

I believe avian influenza has not been identified in the past in the northern fulmar (and auks). It may be more a concern for wild waterfowl - ducks, geese and swans.

I have emailed a contact at Animal and Plant Health Agency (Government Agency) to seek further information and advice. Am also contacting Dr Jan van Franeker and Dr Susanne Kuhn in the Netherlands i.e. the 'Save the North Sea' fulmar project coordinators, also contacts at Shetland, Orkney and Dutch beached bird groups.

I hope to advise you further in coming days.
Many thanks for your involvement and cooperation.

Kind regards,
Dan Turner
NEBBS Group Coordinator



Seal pups at Fast Castle. Simon Wright