
Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. February 2021

Chairman's piece

A first for the Group! Our online talk by Nicky from Borders Forest Trust was successful, with 17 participants enjoying an inspiring and informative presentation. Her depth of knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject shone through. If you haven't heard of the work she mentioned on tree 'communications' etc. then some of it is in a book by Peter Wohlleben, 'The Hidden Life of Trees'. Well worth a read. With days getting longer and the countryside waking up, siskins have finally decided to grace our bird feeders and the song thrushes are in full song mode first thing in the morning.

A walk (following a dentist appointment!) along the 'golf course' cliffs at Eyemouth, in brilliant, calm conditions was a welcome distraction from lockdown. Several paired eiders were obvious, feeding offshore and when we sat for a while, the calm sea revealed the distinctive outline and behaviour of several harbour porpoises. This was on the same day that humpback whales were spotted off the Northumberland coast, (we did wonder but stuck with our initial identification!).

On the 1st day of spring (Monday) we got up early and had a beautiful frosty, sunlit walk along a section of the Whitadder, no otters this time but many signs of the changing season including emerging 'pussy willow'.



Thank you to Malcolm for his report and please note the information on the **Breeding Gull Survey** at the end of Malcolm's report and if you would like to help, get in touch with him directly.

Also there is a piece from Molly about the **Butterfly and Bumblebee surveys**, your help is needed there as well, so please contact Molly direct.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather;

Although February is the shortest month of the year, it has nevertheless been extremely varied. The first week from the 2nd, saw a gusty southeast wind bring spells of wintery showers of rain, sleet and hail. By the 4th, came a 48 hour spell in constant rainfall which were the remnants of Atlantic storm 'Darcy'. The weather front passed through on the 8th bringing a gusty Arctic wind strengthening from the northeast bringing spells of snow showers.

A covering of an inch of snow came on the 10th with the sky clearing to bring frosts, some severe, over the next six nights. The coldest night recorded was the 11th with a low of -10C (14F).

The high thin cloud and frosty nights persisted until the 14th when the wind turned to the southwest. On the 15th the temperature had risen by 15 degrees with a spell of overnight rain, a thaw and a mellow light southerly breeze. Mild conditions continued, with a peak of 13.5C (56F) on 20th with sunny spells and a light SW wind.

The last week of the month saw the temperatures remain above the average for February, with alternate days of sunny spells and overcast conditions. A strong SW gale blew on the 23rd but the mild conditions persisted.

Rainfall figures for the month were 76.5mm (3.1 inches). Most of this came in the four day period with non-stop rain from 3th - 6th and a total of 62mm (2.5 inches).

Frost came each night from the 1st to the 15th with frost persisting all day (11th) and the temperature only rising to -2C (28F). The warmest day came on the 20th, a calm pleasant Sunday and a balmy maximum of 13.5C (56F), making it feel like the start of Spring. A very mild night was recorded on the 24th with the temperature only falling to 9C (48F), which compared to -10C (14F) on the 11th, is an example of how varied conditions have been this month -- should we be worried? Only time will tell!!

Birds; The weather this month was responsible for good movement of our birds, particularly during the 2nd week when some snow and very low temperatures brought numbers of winter thrushes and finches into local gardens.

A flock of c.36 **Goldfinches** with 10 **Siskins** roamed around the Castle Terrace area during the first week with a pair of **Blackcap** in a Castle Drive garden (1st). A male Blackcap was also regular in a Ladywell Place garden in Tweedmouth, under the cover of the railway embankment. Near the Tennis Courts (3rd), the wet weather brought 42 **Oystercatchers** and 28 **Curlew** to feed on the soft turf of the football pitch. There were 14 **Goldeneye**, 5 **Redbreasted Merganser** with a pair of **Goosander** on the swollen Tweed, while in Tweed Dock, were another 6 Goldeneye and 2 **Little Grebes**. By the 5th, the Goldeneye had built up to 28 with a 2nd year **Little Gull** feeding with c.100 **Black headed Gulls** on the floodwater surface near the dock.

On the tops at Billylaw (7th) were 12 **Golden Plover** with 42 **Teal** and 14 **Mallard** gathered on Middle Ord pond. The high tide on the 8th brought 12 **Ringed Plover** onto Sandstell Point with 54 **Redshank** roosting on the foot of the Walls at Wellington Terrace. At New Water Heugh the flooded fields held 76 **Lapwing** and 9 **Great black backed Gulls**.

The temperature dropped rapidly by the 11th and groups of **Fieldfare** came into gardens around Berwick, Tweedmouth and Ord. In my garden in Cornwall Avenue, came 12 Fieldfare and 5 **Redwings** along with 8 Goldfinch, all of which moved around the local gardens. It is very important to put out clean

water in such cold conditions and a bag of cheap apples from the local supermarket gave the thrushes sustenance for a few days

Two scarcer birds turned up with a **Black Redstart** on the walls at Wellington Terrace, for one day only and a **Woodcock** at Castle Hills. Near the latter site a **Red throated Diver** was seen feeding near Chateaux Pedro cottage.

The winter thrushes stayed around for a few days being seen in gardens of Tweedmouth, West End, around Spa Well, Spittal, The Meadows and Highfields to the north of the town.

By the 15th milder condition had returned and waders were noted on the move with 15 **Bar tailed Godwits**, 14 Ringed Plover and 62 **Sanderling** on Little Beach. A skein of 220 **Pink footed Geese** flew north over East Ord (17th) and a **Nuthatch** was calling in Ord Country Park. An interesting record of a wintering **Chiff-chaff** giving a sub-song call in the winter sunshine came from Castle Terrace.

An early morning visit to Little Beach recorded 46 Ringed Plover, 52 **Dunlin**, 220 **Sanderling**, 4 **Grey Plover** and 48 **Turnstone**. This is the largest flock of Sanderling I have ever seen on Little Beach and they did not stay long as numbers were back down the next day. A visit to Cocklawburn (19th) recorded 42 **Greylag Geese**, 18 **Pink footed Geese** and 3 **Tundra Bean Geese** along with a flock of 24 **Twite**. The Bean Geese winter here in small numbers in the coldest part of the winter.

Milder conditions had returned by the 21st, and a flock of 48 Teal and 14 Mallard were on Middle Ord pond. The Tweed was in full spate and at West Ord, a herd of 24 **Whooper Swans** were with 19 **Mute Swans**. On the sunny grass bank a flock of 54 Redwing were feeding with some giving a little sub-song. With them were 8 Yellowhammers, the 3 males in there bright yellow plumage. A returning **Gannet** was seen over Spittal Bay (24th), with a pair of **Common Scoter** and 3 Teal on the high tide. The flooded fields at New Water Heugh held 34 Lapwing, 65 Curlew with c.400 **Herring Gulls** in a roost with 2 **Lesser black-backed Gulls** and 8 Cormorants. Another Woodcock was lifted from the footpath near Toddles Shiel.

A large flock of 126 Curlew were at Cocklawburn (26th) along with 94 Greylag Geese, and 3 **Stonechats**. At Saltpan rocks was a fine male **Long-tailed Duck** with 4 Common Scoter and 5 **Guillemots**.

Numbers of Pink footed Geese were returning north over the last three days of the month, mainly seen at dawn and dusk.

Mammals; **Brown Hares** were seen at Billylaw, Ord Moor, Loanend, Horncliffe and in the coastal fields at Cheswick . Three **Roe Deer** were seen at Lilliestead, early on the 10th with another two at West Ord on the other bank of the Tweed.

Insects; The first butterfly of the season was noted on the 21st with a **Small Tortoiseshell** on the wing at Riverside Road, Tweedmouth. In Cornwall Avenue, both single **White-tailed Bumblebee** (*Bombus lucorum*) and **Early Bumblebee** (*Bombus pratorum*) were on the wing over the final days of the 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.

Breeding Gull survey of Berwick.

The BWG have done a breeding Gull survey every five years, covering the town area since 2001. It came about in the 1990's when the Gulls were being noisy smelly neighbours to many people within the town. The Council were asked to cull the birds in order to remove them but were voted against on the grounds of protection within the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

The Herring Gull is a protective species and is declining in numbers so much that it has been put on the amber danger list as a European breeding species. The council offered to cover Chimneys and protect various buildings within town to discourage nest building. Publicity was also made not to feed the birds by the riverside, including the Swans as this was a source of easy 'pickings' and encouraged them into breeding here.

The last survey revealed that the number nesting birds are decreasing and they are moving away from the town centre and local housing estates, into Industrial trading estates. The largest number of nesting birds in 2016 being at the large Maltings complex and derelict factories at Tweedmouth on the Ord Industrial Estate.

Our survey is divided into eight areas.

1. Highfields estate, North Rd. Industrial Est; and Castle Terrace.
2. Berwick outside the Walls – including Middle School and Hospital.
3. Berwick inside the Walls.
4. Tweedmouth east of the railway.
5. Ord Industrial Est; Hiveacres and East Ord.
6. Prior Park estate, Tweedmouth Grove, Retail park, and Leisure Centre
7. Tweedmouth west of the railway, including High School and Highcliffe.
8. Spittal (east from the Lifeboat Station).

The survey will cover from May 1st to July 17th with two counts being made 6 weeks apart.

I will endeavour to get maps and directions on line with forms and maps also available in paper form. MHu.

Butterfly and Bumblebee surveys

For at least 15 years BWG has conducted butterfly surveys, originally at Tommy the Miller's field, and then at Cocklawburn and Hunting Hall Farm. The transects are walked weekly from April until September, and the results are sent to Butterfly Conservation. The results, together with those from the Garden counts, the Wider Countryside surveys and the Big Butterfly Count, provide a very good picture of the frequency and abundance of butterflies throughout the UK, making them possibly the most studied insects in the world.

We have found these surveys most enjoyable. Of necessity they are conducted in good weather and in beautiful countryside. In this part of the country there are not so many different species as to make things very difficult. It is easier if pairs do the count, one to record and both to observe. We are very keen for more people to become involved. If you are interested, please get in touch with Molly (details below). "Beginners" are very welcome.

The Bumblebee surveys proceed in a similar manner, but need only to be conducted monthly, from March until October. These take place at Cocklawburn, Hunting Hall and in Berwick itself. I knew nothing about Bumblebees when I was asked in 2014 to do the survey at Cocklawburn but find it very interesting. I do make mistakes, but I am learning. Again, get in touch with Molly.

Covid is of course affecting these. At the moment butterfly Conservation are advising people to stay home rather than count, Bumblebee Conservation are saying to go ahead. Perhaps this will be clarified.
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