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# Berwick Wildlife Group

[www.berwickwildlifegroup.uk](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.uk)



Facebook; Berwick Wildlife Group

## Monthly Review March 2021

### Chairman's piece

Our thanks to Malcolm for his excellent summary of the month.

With the change in season and the prospect of greater freedom to get into the 'wild', we will be looking closely at re-awakening or activities. Obviously the restrictions on numbers gathering together are the greatest barrier and it is difficult to plan at present. We will be pursuing looking for a new meeting venue, due to the sad closure of the United Reformed Church in Spittal.

I sometimes find that spring can 'flash' by and before I miss it, so I am determined to make the most of this one! Our local sparrows, blackbirds and wrens are busy nest building, as are the swans on the Whitadder. I spotted dippers around last years nest site, so perhaps they are as well. Several grey wagtails were active as well.



Grey wagtail at Blue Stones Ford, Simon Wright

My apologies for not forwarding the links from Nicky's (from Borders Forest Trust) talk, here they are;  
First 2 about the Lumber Jills,

<https://forestryandland.gov.scot/learn/heritage/world-war-two/womens-timber-corps>  
<https://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/world-war-two/the-timber-corps-lumber-jills/>

The American Prairie Reserve project,

<https://www.americanprairie.org/wild-sky>

Information if interested in volunteering for the BFT,

[volunteer@bordersforesttrust.org](mailto:volunteer@bordersforesttrust.org)

Contact for Nicky at BFT, for help with a woodland/tree project in **Scotland**

[nhume@bordersforesttrust.org](mailto:nhume@bordersforesttrust.org)

For projects in **England**

[plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk)

## **WILDLIFE REPORTS.**

### **Weather;**

March has been a rather grey, but calm and very dry month

The first week was predominately, light breezes with a high cloud cover filtering weak sunshine. At dusk, the cloud cover came with a drop in temperature bringing slight frosts at night. The coldest night was on the 6<sup>th</sup>, with a fall in temperature to -2.5C, (28F). By then, the wind had turned round to a north-easterly direction with alternate cloudy conditions and sunny spells.

The second and third weeks saw the wind pivot round to the southwest again dragging in showers and gusty winds on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The blustery winds drew in mild air with the temperature reaching a balmy 17C (62F) on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Once again the wind drifted round to the northwest with another fall in temperatures.

A passing cold front on the 26<sup>th</sup> brought a spell of rain overnight and wintery showers the following day with sleet and hail and gusty winds again. The following few days settled back to a veil of high cloud with a fresh SW wind, this had dissipated by the 30<sup>th</sup>, which turned out to be sunny and warm with almost no wind. The temperature rose to 17.5C (64F) the warmest March day in southern England for 28 years. Things changed the last day of the month with a change of wind direction to the north west and cloud from a dying weather front, bringing the prospect of cold conditions over the first week in April and the Easter holiday. --- just typical!!!

There were only 5 days of recorded rainfall all month. The total being 23 mm (0.9 inches), the driest March since 2012. There were eight nights with frost recorded the coldest night already mentioned on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Sunny days were scarce, but the prospect for April is looking better

**Birds;** The variable weather patterns this month did not interfere with the start of the Spring migration, although strong winds during the last week seemed to slow progress down.

A small flock of 24 **Goldeneye** were seen at Blakewell Point (1<sup>st</sup>) on the Estuary, while on the coast a large flock of 116 **Greylag Geese** gathered with 58 **Curlew** and 42 **Oystercatchers**. A pair of **Tufted Duck** was on the pond there. A flock of 46 **Redwings** gathered at Horncliffe House, (3<sup>rd</sup>) some giving

there flute-like sub-song. Back on the coast, a pair of **Common Scoter** were in Spittal Bay (5<sup>th</sup>) along with 3 **Shag**. A flock of 54 **Carrion Crows** had gathered on the low tide at the Calot Shad looking for crustaceans. At Pier House a **Sparrow Hawk** was seen flying off with a House Sparrow prey.

Four **Buzzards** were seen over Paxton House (7<sup>th</sup>) while a flock of 25 **Whooper Swans** and 28 **Mute Swans** had gathered in a young Kale field at Mount Pleasance Farm, near Long lands School. The gull roost at West Ord held c.200 **Herring Gulls**, mainly immatures, while 3 **Red breasted Mergansers** were on the river there. Further downstream, 5 **Lesser black backed Gulls** were noted in the gull roost at New water Heugh.

A flock of 22 Oystercatchers had gathered on the grass open area on Dock Road, Tweedmouth (8<sup>th</sup>). Down the coast small birds were noted at Cocklawburn (9<sup>th</sup>) with a flock of 24 **Linnets**, and 3 **Yellowhammers** with 6 **Reed Buntings**. A flock of 68 Common Scoter were off Saltpan rocks, where a flock of 38 **Twite** were feeding on the grassy cliff-face. A group of 12 **Fieldfares** were at West Ord (11<sup>th</sup>) and 4/5 **Gannets** were seen flying south over Spittal Bay.

The notable birds of the month were a flock of c.12 **Snow Buntings**, which fed on Little Beach over 5 days (12<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>). One male bird was ringed, but could not be identified. However the ringing schemes in the French Alps and of wintering birds in Teesdale are ongoing this year. - take your pick!!

Also on the Little Beach with them were 8 **Rock Pipits**, including a Scandinavian race bird (subsp. 'littoralis') and 6 **Pied Wagtails**. Waders there were, 28 **Ringed Plover**, 52 **Sanderling** and 56 **Turnstone**.

A return visit to Little Beach (16<sup>th</sup>) could only record 3 Snow Buntings but a flock of 11 **Purple Sandpipers** had joined the waders feeding on the beached seaweed. The same day a member visited Needles Eye and noted 100+ **Kittiwakes** back on the cliffs, but the few Auks were roosting south of the breeding site. To the southern end of our area 2 **Long tailed Ducks** and 4 **Red throated Divers** were seen off Saltpan rocks.

A family of 3 **Bullfinches** were seen at the Goodie Patch, Tweedmouth (18<sup>th</sup>). A **Nuthatch** was calling at Castle Hills (20<sup>th</sup>) with a flock of 44 **Wigeon** and 42 Goldeneye at Yarrow Slake. The Whooper Swan flock moved to Green Hill, Horncliffe (21<sup>st</sup>) with 46 birds present.

A group of 4 **Shelduck** were on Little Beach (22<sup>nd</sup>) along with a **Grey Plover** and 24 Sanderling. Inland at New Mills Wood a total of 3 **Chiff-chaffs** were in song. Four pairs of **Tree Sparrow** were noted at Pier House with a Red throated Diver on the estuary there.

A flock of 48 **Pink footed Geese** grazing at Cocklawburn (23<sup>rd</sup>) had 2 **Tundra Bean Geese** with them. These birds come from northern Scandinavia and Russia and often associate with pink-feet. A large flock of 164 Greylag were further down the coast at Cheswick. While on the coast at Cheswick Black rocks were 42 Sanderling, 2 Purple Sandpipers and 4 Turnstones. Back in Berwick a female **Siskin** visited a feeder at Ravensdowne, a scarce bird in the centre of town. Another Chiff-chaff was seen and heard in the dene at Clayhole Shiel, East Ord (24<sup>th</sup>) along with 6 **Goldfinches**. At New Mills Wood a **Nuthatch** was calling and c.30 Fieldfares were seen at Low Cocklaw. Another Chiff-chaff was singing in West End, Tweedmouth where a female Bullfinch was seen two days later.. A **Goldcrest** was seen feeding in shrubbery on Ness Gate beside the Walls (26<sup>th</sup>).

A flock of c.30 **Chaffinches** were in a newly seeded field at Middle Ord with a pair of **Little Grebe** seen on the pond there. Two pairs of Teal and single pairs of Shelduck and Canada Geese were at West Ord where two days later (30<sup>th</sup>) the first **Sand Martins** had arrived with five birds seen and a further two downstream at New water Heugh. A very large flock of c.140 Whooper Swans were seen and heard mid-morning over Berwick (31<sup>st</sup>) flying north.

**Mammals;**      **Brown Hares** were seen at Billylaw, Ord Moor and Loanend, Horncliffe.

**Insects;** Despite the warmer conditions, few insect records have been submitted. Several Bee species are on the wing but the cold nights are suppressing butterfly records. A fine Peacock was noted at Pier House on the last day of the month.

**Other records;** A pod of 12 **Bottle nosed Dolphins** were very active in Spittal Bay (12<sup>th</sup> with a further 5 seen three days later at Cheswick.

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.**

### **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 Town 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 large Maltings complex and derelict factories at Tweedmouth in 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 1<sup>st</sup> to July 17<sup>th</sup> with two counts being made 6 weeks apart.

Please contact me if you would like to take part and I will supply details required. MHu.