
Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. April 2021

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Chairman's Piece

What a month, if I have to wait much longer, my courgette plants will be crawling out of the frame by themselves!

Our local river is waking up with a vengeance; mute swan sitting, dippers appear to have had a first brood, and c.100 sand martins back at their nest site. I hope the rain now arrived won't be enough to cause a major river surge and wipe the cliff out, as it did a couple of years ago. Chiffchaff, willow warblers, grasshopper warblers, reed warblers, blackcaps, yellowhammer are all singing and a wood full of primroses is in full bloom near the badger sett. Swallows are joining the sand martins feeding over the river and in anticipation of their imminent arrival our swift boxes are back up (taped shut for now to stop our ever present house sparrows squatting!). Siskins are regular visitors to the feeders, along with the usual suspects including the occasional nuthatch. I am sure I heard a cuckoo yesterday morning. Up date soon on getting the group kick started hopefully!

Weather;

April has been very dry with plenty of sunshine, but is also going to be recorded as the frostiest April in 60 years.

The month started with average temperatures for early April, but on the 5th a weather front from the north-east passed through bringing some rain which gradually turned to snow, being driven by a bitter wind coming down from the Arctic. The snow showers on the following days were driven right across the country by the bitter northeast wind for the next few days, reaching the far southwest and the Channel Islands. As the wind eased down, a long spell of sunny days started but with the persistent wind still in the cold quarter.

A large high pressure zone developed and both air and ground frosts were recorded each night throughout until the 26th. With the sun getting stronger each day the temperature also rose, reaching a high of 60F on the 19th but still falling back to near freezing point each night.

Change came about on the 26th with a small area of low pressure passing across the high bringing a band of light showers with the wind returning back to the northwest. A pre-dawn heavy shower of hail and sleet gave a covering of white to Berwick on the final day of the month, just another quirk to an unusual April.

Rainfall for the month was 12.5mm. (0.55inches). Frost occurred on 24 nights, the coldest on the 10th with a low of -4.5C (24F).

Birds; Despite the sunny dry conditions and cold winds coming from the north, migration has struggled to proceed. A notable movement this spring was the block movement of **Whooper Swans**,

which left their wintering grounds in Lancashire and Yorkshire 'en masse'. The 31st March saw a huge flock of c.140 birds flying over Berwick mid-morning, a wonderful sight and sound. Summer migrants arrived in 'dribs and drabs' many not yet reaching here by the end of the month, but one big surprise was the appearance of two **Avocets** on Yarrow Slake. Records show that this was the first record for the Tweed since these attractive waders re-established themselves from 'extinction' in England in 1947. They became the emblem of the RSPB with their first success of breeding in the 1950's at Minsmere in Norfolk and have gradually moved 'up country' since. They first appeared in Northumberland in 2008 and went on with two breeding successes since.

At West Ord (2nd) 10 Whooper Swans and 28 **Mute Swans** were on site along with 2 **Goldeneye**. A group of c.230 **Herring Gulls** were in the roost there (4th) they were mainly immature birds (where were they coming/going to?). A group of 52 **Cormorants** had gathered at New water Heugh with two 'sinensis' birds from the Continent along with 34 Redshank.

A day of wintery showers and a NE gale saw two **Wheatears** sheltering under the cliffs at Little Beach (5th) along with 6 **Rock Pipits** and 8 **Pied Wagtails**. Waders there included 46 **Sanderling**, 24 **Redshank** and 8 **Turnstones**. Three **Tufted Duck** were on Middle Ord pond (6th) and 18 **Sand Martins** with 3 **Swallows** were feeding over the Tweed.

A flock of 86 **Pink footed Geese** in the fields at Cocklawburn (7th) flew off north when disturbed. Further down the coast at Cheswick Black rocks were 38 **Sanderling**, 2 **Purple Sandpipers** and 12 **Turnstone**. A flock of 14 **Canada Geese** were resident in Yarrow Slake (8th) along with 28 **Goldeneye**, 4 **Goosander** and a drake **Shelduck** on the high tide.

A stormy day (9th) found c.60 **Sand Martins** and 12 **Swallows** feeding over the Tweed at West Ord. A large skein of **Pink footed Geese** flew north over Berwick (10th), very high (c.3,000ft). A group of 6 **Yellowhammers** were in a field at Billylaw (11th) with 7 **Goldeneye** still at New water Heugh. Another group of c.760 **Pinkfeet** flew north over Cocklawburn (15th) where 14 **Tufted Duck** were on the pond with 5 **Greylag Geese**. The same day saw 24 **Red throated Diver** gathered off Saltpan rocks with 6 **Guillemots**. A surprise visit at low tide on Yarrow Slake (17th) was a pair of **Avocets**. Word got around most local 'birders' but they were only around a day but they did turn up in the **Redshank** roost on the evening of the 19th. A group of 8 **Teal** were at West Ord (17th) and the first **Sandwich Terns** appeared in the estuary with c.6 birds over Calot Shad.

At Cocklawburn (19th), were another 3 **Sandwich Terns** with birds also seen at Cheswick. Also there were 112 **Sanderling**, the start of a strong migration of this wader with numbers rising to 130 on the 23rd. They were possibly held up by the persistent strong north wind. A pair of **Siskins** were on a feeder in Castle Terrace (19th) with a pair at East Ord the next day. A **Willow Warbler** was in song in Ord Country Park (20th) and a group of 7 **Wigeon** were on Yarrow Slake (21st) with 3 **Teal**, a pair of **Shelduck**, 36 **Curlew** and 62 **Redshank**. A fine male **Yellow Wagtail** was at West Ord (22nd), seen amongst the sheep, also there were 12 **Teal**. A **Sedge Warbler** and **Willow Warbler** were in the scrub at Cocklawburn pond (23rd). A pristine male **Ring Ousel** was seen early on the 25th on the bank above the Tweed, before flying off strongly to the north.

A sea watch over Spittal Bay (27th), saw 27 **Gannets** and 8 **Fulmars** passing southwards within 15 minutes. A **Common Sandpiper** was at Clayhole Shiel and a late **Fieldfare** was seen over New water Heugh. The steady brisk north wind (28th) saw c.140 **Common Scoter** gathered off Cocklawburn, with a passage of c.300/per hour of **Gannets** heading south and c.180 per hour **Kittiwakes** heading north against the wind. A bit of confusion there! A single **Whooper Swan** was at New water Heugh (29th) with a gathering of 86 **Carrion Crows** on the saltmarsh. The final day (30th) brought 14 **Sandwich Terns** and 3 **Arctic Terns** into the estuary at Calot Shad.

Mammals; **Brown Hares** were seen at Billylaw, Ord Moor (3), Loanend, Horncliffe and 5 in the costal fields at Cocklawburn (28th). A dog **Otter** was seen in the Tweed at West Ord (2nd).

Insects;

Butterflies; The cold conditions have kept numbers of early butterflies down, but by mid-month all the 'whites species' including **Orange tip**, had been recorded, along with Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Other dates include **Speckled Wood** (2) at Berrington (23rd) and a 'tatty' **Red Admiral** (29th) near the hide at Yarrow Slake.

Despite the warmer conditions, few other insect records have been submitted.

Local flora; Despite the dry and cold conditions, most spring flowers are coming into bloom. The patch of **Oxlip** on Yarrow Heugh, are well out and spreading near a colony of primroses. I foresee some confusion here!! It's good to report that a couple of **False Oxlips** are flowering again at Cocklawburn. A number of these splendid plants were removed maliciously or stolen for a garden obviously breaking the law. Of course, they may have been removed by botanical 'purest, falsely thinking they would spoil the colony of Cowslips there. They are a natural phenomenon. If you see these plants admire then but leave them in situ for others to see. They are part of our natural heritage.

Other records; A pod of 12 **Bottle nosed Dolphins** were seen (15th) off Saltpan rocks, Cocklawburn.

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 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. I have now got enough recorders and will publish our results in the late Summer MHu.