

# Berwick Wildlife Group

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## Monthly Review. May 2021

### Chairman's piece

Sat here in blazing sun, it seems difficult to remember how wet and cold May was.

Having tried to get ahead of the game with gardening, I was left with indoor sown courgette and French bean plants, ready to go but daren't plant them out because of the risk of killing them!

The affect on all wildlife of the late spring has been obvious; blue tits mistiming breeding, the hirundine's late arrival and tree leaf emergence seemingly on hold for several weeks. Paradoxically it seems to have been a good blossom year and the primroses, cowslips and bluebells have been amazing. On the latter species, we had a few days in Dumfries and Galloway, aiming to visit Carstramon Wood, a SWT site near Castle Douglas, reputed to be one of the best bluebell woods in Scotland. It was! Despite the rain we had a wonderful walk amongst the bluebells with the added bonus of many wonderful trees, the highlight being some of the oldest beech I think we have ever seen.

We finished the trip with a return visit to Carrifran Wildwood, the Borders Forest Trust site near Moffat, which did not disappoint, with the first globeflowers in evidence amongst other sights. The tree regeneration is going really well.

Finally our swifts are back at Apple Tree House, with at least two boxes, (of five), occupied so far and many more potential breeding pairs prospecting. The usual mob of juvenile, non-breeders are having a great time screaming around the area!

We hope to have more news of progress with meetings etc. before long.

Simon

### **WILDLIFE REPORTS.**

#### **Weather.**

May has been the wettest and coldest for many years. The jet stream being south of the U.K, running down over Spain, saw us under the influence of winds from the north, sometimes direct from the Arctic, as various low pressure systems passed through. Normal May conditions usually have a settled influence, from a high pressure zone over the Atlantic but that was prevented by the position of the jet stream this month.

The main concern was the constant threat of frost at night. Conditions were much like the autumn, where the procession of weather fronts brought periods of clear skies at dusk and temperatures dropping to near freezing point. A total of 10 ground frosts were recorded along with some air frosts, most unusual for May. This had a great effect on our wildlife in that spring migration was slowed almost to a halt. Freezing nights caused the death of young in the nest and many early insect species, including butterflies did not survive. Plant life was affected too, as the gardeners amongst us know, with scorching

noted on young foliage as it emerged. Particularly prone to this were species of wild roses, hawthorn and young ash, beech and oak.

Rainfall has been steady throughout, with at least three days each week recording rainfall. Thunder storms were recorded several times early in the month, when the day temperature rose with ground.

At last some clear sunny conditions over the final few days of the month brought a rise in temperature, only to be tempered by morning sea fret and on clearing, an on shore sea breeze. The warmest day came on the 30<sup>th</sup> with 21C (70F) and the coldest night was on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, when the temperature fell to freezing point 0C. (32F). Rainfall was significant with 60mm (2.35 inches) recorded. Lets hope some warm summer days come early next month to make up for a 'lost' Spring.

## **Birds.**

Despite the cold, damp conditions and the persistent north wind, most summer migrants have made it back to their breeding sites. Many arriving back at least 15 days behind their average arrival time in recent years.

Three **Fieldfares** were still around Ord Manor (2<sup>nd</sup>) with **Garden Warbler** in song at West Ord, where 8 **Yellowhammers** were around the sheep feeding troughs. Two **House Martins** were noted with passage **Swallows** at the Coastwatch station (3<sup>rd</sup>). The following day saw stormy conditions with a strong north wind and a coastal northerly sea bird passage over Spittal Bay with **Gannets** (160/hour), **Kittiwakes** (320/Hour), and **Sandwich Terns** (36 north in 30 mins.) Poor weather conditions still with us the next day (5<sup>th</sup>) saw a large gathering of hirondines over the Tweed at West Ord, with estimated 450 **Sand Martins**, 80+ Swallows and 2 House Martins!! A **Raven** was seen over East Ord later in the day.

At Cocklawburn (6<sup>th</sup>), a hunting **Short eared Owl** and a fine male **Wheatear** were notable, with 10 **Common Scoter** and 8 Sandwich Terns at Saltpan rocks. At Yarrow Slake (7<sup>th</sup>) was an early returning **Whimbrel** and a **Little Egret**, while another Raven headed south over East Ord (8<sup>th</sup>) along with my first sighting of a **Swift** of the year.

A pair of **Canada Geese** with 4 goslings were on Middle Ord pond (9<sup>th</sup>), where a pair of **Mallard** were with 6 ducklings. A pair of **Tufted Duck** were at West Ord and 6 Swifts were overhead with a pair of **Grey Partridge** were seen in the lane there. A **Redstart** was in the grounds of Longridge Towers School, with a Wheatear seen at Allerdean. In Flagstaff Park (10<sup>th</sup>) a Garden Warbler was in song with 6 House Martins 'surveying' the eaves of the Barracks and two Swifts over the town. A **Common Sandpiper** was at Clayholes Shiel with a **Lesser Whitethroat** in song there. On the coast, a fine summer plumaged **Red throated Diver** was in Spittal Bay with 4 **Guillemots** and another Raven flying north.

A large flock of 124 Goosanders had gathered at West Ord (12<sup>th</sup>) along with 4 Tufted Ducks and two immature **Common Gulls**. Both **Whitethroat** and **Sedge Warbler** were in song at New water Heugh. A flock of 6 **Turnstone** were still on Little Beach (13<sup>th</sup>).

A large gathering of 216 **Common Scoter**, were off Cocklawburn, with 26 **Eider**, 26 **Guillemots** and 5 **Razorbills**. Numbers of Swifts were building up with c.26 over West Ord (16<sup>th</sup>). The low water roost on Calot Shad (17<sup>th</sup>) held 92 Kittiwakes, 6 Sandwich Terns and 18 **Oystercatchers**. A single Sandwich Tern drifted upstream at New water Heugh (19<sup>th</sup>) where 110 **Mute Swans** had gathered.

Two pairs of **Fulmars** were 'in territory' on Union Bridge with two families of Mallard ducklings on the Tweed. A 'Greenland' race Wheatear was on the Berwick Golf Course, with a Whitethroat singing in the scrub at Fishermans Cove.

A stormy day (22<sup>nd</sup>), recorded a sea bird passage off Berwick pier, with Kittiwakes (c.950/hour); Guillemots (60/hour), Fulmar (26/hour) and Common Scoter (42/hour), all flying north mid-morning. The pair of Canada Geese at Middle Ord (23<sup>rd</sup>) were still present with 4 goslings. A flock of c.30 Swifts had gathered over West Ord (26<sup>th</sup>), with 42 Goosander at New water Heugh, where a pair of Whitethroat were feeding young in a nest.

The annual Breeding Seabird count at Needles Eye recorded; Guillemot 68 nests, Razorbills 22 nests, Herring Gulls 24 nests, Kittiwake 1078 nests, Fulmar 29 nests and Shag 3 nests. A further 48 Guillemots, and 8 Razorbills were on the sea with 8 more Shags roosting on the cliff. A slight drop in breeding numbers compared to last year with a worrying drop of 15% with the Guillemots. Also at the site were 12 Linnets, a breeding pair of Sedge Warblers, a pair of Shelduck and a pair of Pheasants. Finally, a group of 12 Greylag Geese flew north over East Ord early morning (28<sup>th</sup>).

#### **Mammals;**

Three **Brown Hares** and a **Roe Deer** hind were seen at Billylaw, Ord Moor (9<sup>th</sup>).

#### **Insects;**

Butterflies; The cold, damp conditions during May has kept numbers of butterflies down, with the 'whites' getting out in the brief sunny spells, but others 'keeping a low profile'! The sunshine of the last few days of the month saw **Small Heath** and **Small Copper** recorded in the dunes at Cocklawburn, but the 'vanesids' are still scarce.

#### **Local flora;**

Despite the damp, cold conditions, the semi-lockdown situation has encouraged people to walk locally and to notice what is in flower over the month around town. The white form of **Ivy leaved Toadflax** is well in bloom on the walls of the Rowing Club boathouse and we noted a new site for **Fairy Foxglove** (*Erinus alpinus*) near the Ness Gate on the walls.

#### **Other records;**

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.**

**A progress report;** Several of our sites have now been covered and the trend, like the last survey in 2016, is seeing many birds moving away from domestic sites out to the large flat roof sites of the Industrial estates. The traditional sites in housing estates and within Berwick are still occupied but numbers so far are down, particularly at Highcliffe and in Prior Park. Oddly numbers have a small increase at Spittal. The largest colony is still in the Tweedmouth Industrial Estate, where the birds are attracted to the Simpsons Maltings and are regularly feeding on spilt grain. The first count saw 118 nests here along with 2 Lesser Black Backed Gull sites. It is also interesting to note that several pairs have chosen the local supermarket venues. Morrison's, Tesco's and the retail park in Tweedmouth are all favoured this time.

**With the poor weather in May, will recorders please complete the records by the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in July so we can record the results in the August Newsletter.** MHu.

