
Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. June 2021

Chairman's Piece

What an incredibly flower filled season this is, both in the wild and the garden!

The highlight of Penny's and my month was a visit to Cluny House Garden near Aberfeldy, a private 'garden', overlooking the Tay Valley. More like woodland than a garden, filled with specimen trees, including the second widest Giant Sequoia in the country (was the first but some re-measuring done!) and a wonderful naturalised selection of plants, including many primulas, lilies, azaleas/ rhododendrons and much more. You can walk around the hillside site for hours on the many paths. Even more importantly there are many red squirrels that we sat and watched for ages, with the added bonus of a tree creeper on the sequoia's bark, an ideal hunting ground! On that trip we overnighted near a loch above the Tay valley, with a distant sighting of a black-throated diver feeding and the surrounding vegetation dotted with chickweed wintergreen. We had spectacular evening views of the Cairngorms with Schiehallion, predominant.

More locally, I have had some more success with the trail camera on the badger set, had frequent early morning sightings of a large goosander family and one fleeting glimpse of a kingfisher, that I am convinced is nesting somewhere near the ford on the Whitadder. The sand martin colony is thriving but no sightings of otter this month. Thank you to Malcolm for collating the records. Simon.

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather; June has not lived up to its title of 'Flaming June', although a cool month, constantly being tempered by spells of cool northerly winds, it did manage to reach a high of 80F mid-month. The spectacle of a partial eclipse of the sun on the 10th, was spoiled by moving clouds but the experience of the dimming of daylight was notable around the 11 a.m. peak.

The month started dry with sunny spells and a light wind from the south. Bright and hazy sunshine lasted over the first two weeks with the temperature reaching 80F on the 13th. The following day the wind turned to the northwest with a cold front bringing some light rain overnight. Pleasant conditions returned for the next five days when a cold blast came from the north-east on the 19th., as the wind changed direction again. Again it brought a spell of light showers.

Conditions cleared again for five days, when an active low pressure area approached on the 24th from the south-west, tracking over southern England. This brought us a gusty northeast wind, a drop in temperature by 10 degrees or so and a spell of heavy showers over-night. The temperature fell very low in central and northern Scotland with some northern glens recording a slight frost -1C (30F). These conditions continued with a dull damp day on the 26th with a temperature of 12C (54F), making it feel more like October than June.

The final few days saw the temperature rise to what should be normal for June, with sunny spells, quite a lot of high cirrus cloud, with sea 'fret' to start the mornings off. All part of the changing scene of what has been a variable month.

Rainfall for what has been a dry month was 24mm (0.9 inches). The driest June since 2010.

Birds; June is usually the month when most bird species have settled down with the breeding cycle. Most sightings are of family groups and the more unusual breeding records. With us here in the Berwick area the numbers of moulting immature Mute Swans gathered on the Tweed is significant and this year it would seem that Canada Geese have come to 'keep them company'.

The irregular weather pattern started to have effect with the birds from mid-month onwards, as the stormy spell saw a few unusual sea birds moving close to shore with the windy conditions. The biggest surprise was the appearance of a **Rose coloured Starling** in a Tweedmouth garden. It only stayed 24 hours or so, but nevertheless was a striking rarity to come into 'our patch'.

A group of 6 **Arctic Terns** were roosting on Saltpan rocks, Cocklawburn (1st) and a male **Garden Warbler** was in full song near Chain Bridge, Horncliffe (2nd), where a family group of **Bullfinches** were seen. **Canada Geese** were on the move northwards to moult, (most birds heading north to the Moray Firth, the traditional moulting area for birds in Northern Britain). A party of 36 headed north over East Ord (5th), while on Middle Ord pond (6th), a pair had hatched 6 goslings. A further 42 birds were at New water Heugh, with another group of 16 gathered on Sandstell Point, Spittal (8th).

At West Ord (13th) a group of 52, mainly drake **Mallard** had gathered. Equally a group of 76, mainly male **Eider** had gathered of Middle Skerr, Cocklawburn the next day. A **Grey Partridge** was seen in the dunes there with a pair of **Ringed Plover** on the shore. A group of 25 **Goosander** were on Calot Shad (11th) along with 14 **Lesser black backed Gulls** in the gull roost.

The Canada Geese numbers rose significantly, with 310 in Yarrow Slake (17th), The highest number recorded on 'our patch' with another pair with 4 goslings at New water Heugh. Also at Yarrow Slake were the first returning post breeding waders, with 14 **Lapwing**, 17 **Curlew** and 2 **Little Egrets** on site at high tide. The appearance of the **Rose coloured Starling** in the West End, Tweedmouth (18th) came late in the day, but a good search the following day could not relocate it. Keep your eyes open as it could well turn up again in the Autumn as Starling flocks as the build up in numbers before migration.

A flock of 16+ **Swifts** were over Billylaw (20th) with 4 **Tufted Ducks** on Middle Ord pond and a pair of **Coots** with 3 juveniles. Also this day, drake **Mallard** numbers had reached 64 at West Ord.

A **Mute Swan** count on the estuary (21st) recorded 326 birds on the Calot Shad area and a further 136 in the Tweed Dock, the highest total of moulting birds for a number of years. A high count of 148 Canada Geese were with them. A strong north wind on the 23rd saw a seabird movement off the Pier with; **Kittiwakes** (100/hour), **Guillemot** (40/hour) flying north, 5 **Manx Shearwaters**, a single **Red throated Diver** and a surprising sight of 2 **Great Northern Divers**, all heading north into the wind. The persistent cold wind brought a group of c.25 **Swallows** feeding low over the estuary mouth (25th), along with 22 **Black headed Gulls** and 2 **Common Gulls** (both species) returning post breeding birds. A male **Whitethroat** was on territory in the old factory site at Spittal Point.

At West Ord (27th) a pair of **Shelduck** were seen with 3 ducklings along with 2 drake **Teal** and 76 **Sand Martins**, gathered on overhead cables over the river. Later in the day a high count of 260 Kittiwakes were in the Gull roost on the Calot Shad with 10 **Oystercatchers**.

A surprise migrant was a calling **Cuckoo** on Cocklawburn dunes (28th), which was seen moving south through the dunes. A pair of Tufted Duck had 7 ducklings on the pond there, along with a duck Mallard and 8 ducklings, probably a second brood of the year. Mallard success was also seen at West Ord again, with a duck and 8 tiny ducklings there on the low tide.

Mammals; It was good to note an **Otter** with two cubs in the Tweed (2nd) early morning at West Ord. Two **Brown Hares** were seen on Murton Craggs (13th), with another on at Middle Ord (27th).

Insects;

Butterflies; The lack of sunshine during the month seems to have effected all emerging insects on the wing. Certainly both the butterfly and moth populations are very low this year. Perhaps a rise in numbers will return for the milder autumn months. This has made recording butterfly numbers difficult, with the weekly transect count on the Cocklawburn dunes a bit disappointing. Some species like Common Blue, Small Heath and Wall are holding their own in favourable sites but the lack of 'vanescids' except the odd Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell is starting to 'ring alarm bells'.

Other insects recorded include a record of a **Red and Black Froghopper** seen in the Dene at Clayholes Shiel, East Ord (6th) see photo below. It is not common in Northumberland, being of southern origin. A **Scorpion fly** (*Panorpa germanica*), was seen at the Large Skipper site on Yarrow Heugh (23rd).

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 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.

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 lower, particularly at Highcliffe and in Prior Park. Oddly numbers have a small increase Spittal. The largest colony is still in the Tweedmouth Industrial Estate where the birds are attracted to the Simpsons Maltings, where the birds 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. Both 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 2nd week in July so we record the results in the August Newsletter.
MHu.



Rose coloured starling

From Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

All our events are listed on the website www.nwt.org.uk/events so have a browse and we hope to see you at one of them soon. Please do spread the word with group members, friends and family. We really need your support in these difficult times.





Goosander family on the Whiteadder. Simon Wright

There are now 400 tiny feet pattering around NWT's East Chevington nature reserve as a hundred tiny harvest mice, which weigh the same as a 10p coin, have been released at the reserve at Druridge Bay. Their release, made possible by a large private donation, will reinforce what is one of the few harvest mouse colonies north of the River Tyne.

In 2004, Newcastle University PhD student Wendy Fall actively bred 240 water voles with the help of volunteers, schools and community groups. They were released on the East Chevington site as the extensive reed beds provided a suitable habitat for the mice, which build distinctive circular grass nests on tall plants 3ft from the ground. However, in the following months, surveys and searches didn't show any signs of mice or nests, which led conservationists to think the reintroduction may not have been successful. Fast forward to 2019 and Wendy took a call from NWT's Catch My Drift project team with news that volunteers had found sets of two nests on two separate locations on the reserve - built by descendants from the originally released mice. Read the full story and hear from Project Officer, Sophie Webster, on our website.



Harvest mouse (NWT)



Stag Beetle (NWT)

NWT and the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) is asking gardeners to help the region's beetles. At this time of year, beetles are normally out in force looking for mates. Stag beetles are a classic example, with males locking their jaws and wrestling each other over mating sites. However, conservationists fear that the topsy-turvy weather in the spring - including an exceptionally cold April followed by a deluge of rain in May - could have had a detrimental impact on beetle populations this year. In response, the 2021 Wild About Gardens Bring Back Our Beetles campaign is calling on gardeners to support beetles by:

- Recording the different kinds found in their garden using iNaturalist - a popular nature app which helps people identify and record wildlife using their phone.
- Creating beetle banks in their garden, and planting species such as hawthorn, dogwood, and hogweed, and herbs including angelica, fennel, and chervil.

Anybody can pledge their patch for beetles and download a Bring Back our Beetles guide. There are more than 4,000 beetle species across the UK, but many are really struggling due to habitat loss, the use of pesticides and fertilisers and unpredictable weather caused by climate change.