

Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review. November 2021

Chairmans Piece

I hope this finds you all safe and well and that you have escaped the devastation of the storm, although I suspect some may not have! The affect on wildlife will have been immediate but also longer term, with loss or change to some habitats such as large trees. On the 'plus' side new opportunities may exist as the countryside recovers and develops in a different way.

In 1988 I visited the scene of the 'Great Storm of 87' (of BBC weatherman Michael Fish fame!) just after I started work with the National Trust. Many ancient beech trees were lost, but the natural processes after such an event were already happening and encouragingly the knee-jerk reaction to tidy up had been resisted in some areas, despite public opposition, ('When will I be able to walk my dog under those old trees again?!')

Last month we had an enjoyable and informative evening with Patrick, in his new role as chair of the Northumberland AONB Partnership and learnt of his other work with Ingram Farm and his guided walk service.

Coming up we have a repeat of our successful New Year walk on the 8th January, with the aim of looking for early signs of spring in our changing times, as well as a enjoyable walk along the Tweed estuary. Meet at the north end of the old bridge in Berwick at ???

Our first indoor meeting of the New Year will be from ????? in the William Elder Building at 7.30 on the ???

WILDLIFE REPORTS.

Weather

After a warm October, the first week of November saw temperatures fall to near normal for the time of year. The wind settled into a north westerly direction with mainly cloudy conditions and showers. After a wet afternoon on the 8th, the wind fell light and clearer skies prevailed, often filtered by a thin veil of high cloud by the end of each day.

The next ten days saw a series of colourful sunrises, with the added glory of a double rainbow early on the 15th. The sunny, quiet conditions saw a change in wind direction to the southwest and warm air coming up from the Azores. Temperature rose each day and peaked on the 19th at 14C (58F). More unusual was it only dropped to 11C (52F) overnight, making it the warmest November night in a decade.

All change, came on the 21st. with the wind swinging round to the north drawing cold air down from the Arctic. Slight frosts occurred over the next five nights and by day, wintery showers, a veil of high cloud and a strengthening wind were the first signs of a storm named 'Arwen' by the Met Office. Overnight the winds reached storm-force with gusts up to 80mph, with periods of heavy rain, sleet and hail. The first snowfall was recorded a higher levels. One gust reached 98mph to the south of our area at Brizlee Park, Alnwick.

Around Berwick, it inflicted damage to property and trees, lifting ridge tiles, tiles and fascia boards on many houses. Several trees were felled and badly damaged with limbs torn out with conifers suffering the worst. Transport services were brought to a halt, with the East Coast railway line was closed for three days and parts of the A1 were closed for 24 hours. Advice given was to stay at home! Fortunately, electricity supplies were not disrupted but large areas of the Borders were without a supply for 24 hours and Radio and TV services were interrupted. The Water Board had to cut supplies while repairs to electrical services were restored. It was the most damaging storm in the last 50 years. Some areas and the northeast are still struggling without power, communications and water.

Following the storm, quiet, but very cold days followed with frost at night but as is the way this year, the temperature rose by 15 degrees on the last day of the month reaching 12C (53F).

Rainfall figures for the month were 57mm (2.125 inches). The storm on the 27th brought the wettest 24 hour spell with 25mm, an inch of rain. The warmest day was the 18th/19th at 14.5C (58F) and the coldest night was the 28th with a low of -2C (28F). The end of a very eventful month!!

Birds

The month has seen our birdlife settle into a winter mode, with daily movements between roost sites and feeding areas.

A flock of 64 **Greylag Geese** were on Yarrow Slake (1st) with 73 **Mallard**, 3 **Goldeneye** and 168 **Redshank** on Calot Shad. Winter thrushes were still trickling in from the Continent with 5 **Redwing**, 2 **Fieldfares** and 14 **Blackbirds** in Flagstaff Park (2nd). A **Spotted Redshank** and a single **Snow Bunting** was with the waders on Little Beach (4th). At Cocklawburn, there were 210 **Lapwing** and 180 **Black headed Gulls** in the coastal fields with 2 Redwing, 5 Blackbirds, 28 **Twite** and a male **Stonechat**. A flock of 144 **Golden Plover** had gathered on Murton Craggs (5th). On Calot Shad (7th) were 34 **Curlew** and 26 Mallard and an Immature **Gannet** and 2 **Guillemots** were noted in Spittal Bay. The roost in Meadow Haven held 22 **Cormorants** and 28 **Shags** with 28 **Eider** in the sea there. A wader count on Little Beach (8th) recorded 40 **Oystercatchers**, 21 **Dunlin**, 17 **Sanderling**, 8 **Bar tailed Godwits**, 43 Redshank, 46 **Turnstone** and 10 **Rock Pipits**.

A male **Merlin** was hunting **Skylark** and Pipits at Cocklawburn (11th). Waders on the shore there included 3 **Ringed Plover**, 12 Sanderling and 2 **Purple Sandpipers**. A **Great crested Grebe** was noted in Spittal Bay (12th), with 2 **Red throated Divers**, 5 **Common Scoters** and 3 adult Gannets off shore. On the Tweed (14th) was a male **Grey Wagtail** near the Royal Border Viaduct with 6 **Goldeneye** feeding there.

A Gull count at the New water Heugh roost (15th) recorded c.660 **Herring Gulls**, 2 **Lesser BB Gulls**, 8 **Great BB Gulls**, and c.130 Black Headed Gulls. Also there were 12 **Wigeon**, 10 Goldeneye and 18 Lapwing. Wader numbers have fallen here since the erection of the new set of power lines across the Tweed.

A **Black throated Diver** was in Spittal Bay(17th) with 5 Guillemots and 3 Shag. A visit to Cocklawburn(18th) noted a flock of 54 **Linnets**. Off Middle Skerr were c.420 Common Scoter and 24 Eider with 2 Bar tailed Godwit and 4 Sanderling on the shore. Further up the coast at Saltpan rocks were a further 72 Common Scoter and 2 Guillemots.

Pink footed Geese were on the move again over East Ord (20th) with 76 flying south. A group of 18 Golden Plover were on Murton Craggs (21st) and 5 **Teal** back in Middle Ord pond. A further 24 Teal were on the in spate Tweed, at West Ord with 14 Mallard, 2 **Moorhens** and 24 Redshank. A further c.450 Pink feet flew south over Tweedmouth (22nd). A visit to Needles Eye found 12 Cormorants and 5 Shags roosting on the cliffs, with 2 Red throated Divers and 5 Guillemots on the sea. A fine male Merlin flew over East Ord (24th) heading for the coast. On the estuary (15th) 6 Ringed Plover, 16 Oystercatchers, 9 Great BB Gulls and 3 Rock Pipits were on Calot Shad. A family of **Whooper Swans** were in a field at West Ord (28th), two adults and 3 immatures, while at New water Heugh, 22 Goldeneye were seen.

Mammals

A group of five **Grey Seals**, including a large bull, were seen swimming up the Tweed in spate at West Ord (28th). They were in two groups on each shore and were obviously hunting fish on the rising tide. They were watched as they passed Paxton House and on up to the Chain Bridge well up from the coast.

Reports since Malcolm wrote this have indicated that at least 45% of this year's record crop of St Abbs NNR grey seal pups have been lost to the storm. I haven't heard news from other areas such as the Farne's and the Isle of May. Orphans are being washed up along the coast.

Insects

Butterflies: It would seem that a **Red Admiral** on my late flowering Buddleja weyeriana, here in Hiveacres, East Ord on the 2nd, was to be the last record this year.

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.**



Simon Wright

Spring is not far away!