

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF APRIL 2011

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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NEXT FIELD TRIP -SATURDAY 4TH JUNE 2011

Hannah's Hill Walk 10 am. – 12 pm. Leader: Jim Clark

A walk through Hannah's Wood, some open hill and back to the Hillend.

Meet at Nursery House, Harehope Hillend. (Turn uphill onto the private road at Harehope Crossroads, on the Alnwick to Chatton road B6346, 3 miles after Eglingham.) Hannah's Hill is part of the Bewick Moors SSSI, with some ancient woodland, junipers and a bit of archaeology thrown in.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN JUNE

Early June is one of the most extraordinary times of year on the seabird colonies. Most of the species will have chicks and their parents will be commuting back and forward from their feeding areas. Every year more details are being found out about breeding season ecology, through the use of data loggers that are attached to species such as Puffins. The importance of feeding areas such as the Farne Deeps is being reinforced by good science.

The grasslands are just coming into their own. Many species of plant are in flower. Species-rich wet meadows contain Water Avens, Lady's Smock, Water Forget-me-not, Pignut, Crosswort, Marsh Marigold, Lesser Spearwort, Common Spotted Orchid, Lesser Celendine, Marsh and Common Valerian. There are also the leaves of Meadowsweet, Greater Burnet (south of our area), Common Knapweed as well as the flowering spikes of Common, Hairy, Glaucous and Lesser Pond Sedges. Grasslands that are rich in flowering plants, attract a large numbers of insects especially bumblebees, butterflies and moths. Six or seven species of bumblebees can be found but identification can be tricky. Once the queen has found somewhere to nest, she collects lots of pollen and nectar and then lays her first batch of eggs. She incubates a bit like a bird, sitting on them and 'shivering' her muscles to produce warmth. When the eggs hatch the white grubs eat pollen and nectar, grow rapidly, and then form pupae (like the chrysalises made by butterflies). A few days later the first workers hatch from their pupae and begin helping their mother, expanding the nest and gathering food. *Jack Daw.*

MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 27TH APRIL 2011

For the audience of 32 George produced an adult male Puss Moth – a splendid white moth with patterned black markings; a twig of Red-berried Elder; two bird skulls (Kestrel and House Sparrow) for comparison of brain case and eye socket sizes.

Wildlife notes:

- Look out for Mountain Bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*) on bilberry
- Green Hairstreak butterflies have been seen recently on Alnwick and Beanley moors
- Ring Ouzel & Golden Plover on Alnwick Moor on 17 April; Sweet Cicely growing strongly near Elsdon; 14 Wheatear by the Carey Burn on 22 April; Smooth Newts at Branton; Bats flying at mid-day at Kielder; Otter near south bank of the Tweed, but a long way from the river; a Mallard on Wooler Common pond with 17 chicks (may be 'dumping' behaviour by one or more other females).

Speaker: Chris Livsey – MoD Conservation Land Manager at Otterburn Ranges.

At 58,000 acres Otterburn is the second largest training area in the UK. Most of the land was bought before the 'Great' War. It forms 23% of the National Park. It includes 31 farms which have never been allowed to intensify, so they are farmed in very traditional ways. There is 2,500 ha of woodland, both conifers and some semi-natural ancient woodland. There are 78 scheduled monuments and 600 sites of archaeological interest.

Habitats – Barrowburn hay meadows; Grasslees area with woodland and bastles; heather moorland, parts of which are live firing areas; mires and bogs which have not been subject to drainage; rivers and burns which include two of the cleanest rivers in the UK and which have autumn runs of sea trout.
Species – Specialities include: Barn Owl, but bad effects of two hard winters; Adders; Large Heath butterflies; Black Grouse now only a remnant population despite best conservation efforts; Lapwing, which like the ammunition compound but whose chicks then have to be lifted out (!); breeding Merlin, Hen Harrier and Peregrine; Bats, especially at Linnshiels; Otters; Squirrels (greys increasing); Bog Orchid especially at Crane Moss; Dragonflies & Newts in shell craters.

Conservation work – Most now supported by agri-environment schemes; mire restorations; wild bird plots; hedgerow planting, especially in southern part; gradual conifer removal; controlled (mostly) heather burning.

For more information, Google "Otterburn Ranges" or get leaflets at National Park Visitor Centres.

SWARLAND SNAPSHOTS APRIL 2011

Blackbirds began collecting small food items on the 16th, an event which inevitably attracted the attention of the local Magpies, however it would appear that at least some nestlings were brought off, as the adults were seen collecting large earthworms during the last couple of days of the month, a reasonable indication that young had been fledged. There was no sight or sound of Song Thrush this month. The few that arrived here earlier in the spring seem to have disappeared, one being certainly lost to cat predation, and none of the familiar local song-posts are occupied. Great, Blue and Coal Tit feeder activity has subsided to occasional brief visits by single birds, but all three species are singing locally and there is evidence of nestbox occupation. The wren population appears to have been decimated by the hard winter, with just two sightings this month instead of the near daily recording of recent years and the Goldcrest has been equally scarce.

Chiffchaffs have been singing at several locations around the village, but there are fewer than have been noticed in recent years by this time of the spring. Blackcap song has been heard sporadically on the woodland edge since the 12th. The first Swallow was seen on the 16th, but only two of the nearby familiar nesting sites have got birds back by the end of the month.

A mercury-vapour lamp moth trap run overnight on 9th/10th produced over 170 moths of nine species, 84 Common Quaker; 49 Hebrew Character; 20 Clouded Drab along with a few each of Small Quaker; Red Chestnut; Early Grey; Mottled Grey; Chestnut and Water Carpet. The only butterflies on the wing were small numbers of Orange Tip from the 17th and Small White from the 22nd. Buff-tailed, White-tailed and Red-tailed Bumblebees all appeared to be perhaps a little more numerous than at this time last year. An unusual, if not unique, event was observed on the 21st. The nymph stage of a small "Devil's coach horse" type beetle (genus *Ocypus*) was seen in the process of attacking a six-inch long earthworm, tenaciously grasping it just behind its head, struggling with this enormous prey (about twenty times its own length & infinitely more in weight/ mass) for at least a minute and a half before releasing and scuttling off into the grass, the worm of course slid away unscathed. The unbridled optimism of nature!!!

Dave Makepeace.

Scarce Summer Butterflies in North Northumberland

Following on from the article in last month's newsletter about scarce spring butterflies, I have put together a note about four butterflies for June and July. They are a mixture of two scarce, but findable species and two really rare ones, one of which may not be present. The first two are definitely present and these are our two fritillaries.



Dark Green Fritillary, *Argynnis aglaja*, is quite common in a good year on the dune system on Holy Island and the Long Nanny at Newton-by-the-Sea. Elsewhere along the coast it occurs in smaller numbers from Cocklawburn in the north to Druridge in the south. Being a large butterfly it can be a dramatic sight when seen in any numbers. My reason for including it in this article is to try and establish its inland distribution, in particular whether we have any breeding colonies in the north of the county. It is a strong flier and can range quite widely, so records of single individuals might only mean a wandering individual. Records of more than one would be really valuable as it would hint at a presence of a colony. It has been doing well in the last few years with strong colonies established in the west of County Durham and a new colony in Dipton Woods found in 2008. There is a small colony in Harwood Forest, but I do not know of any north of there. The larval food plants are violets so the chances are that any sightings will be near to damp areas. It will be on the wing from late June through to early August.



The other Fritillary is the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, *Boloria selene*. This has a fair number of colonies in the Wark Forest and a number of sites around Sweethope Lough. As a UK Bio-diversity Action Plan, (BAP), Priority Species, knowledge of its true range would be very valuable. Apart from a couple of sightings near Rothbury last year, the only other known site in the north of the county is Ford Moss, although there have been no records from there for several years. The food plant for the caterpillars is Marsh Violet, *Viola palustris*, and the adults will be on the wing from mid-June to mid-July. I have often found that the adults will nectar on Marsh Thistle, *Cirsium palustre*, which is very convenient as it is a tall plant and can be seen from a distance, especially with binoculars and helps to locate suitably damp areas.



The other two species are either extreme rarities or are not actually present! Small Blue, *Cupido minimus*, was last reliably recorded in 1995 in the county. Previous records refer to Davidson's Lynn at the head of the Usway Burn in 1948 and to an unidentified site on the coast just south of Berwick, thought to be around Cocklawburn nature reserve, during the 1939-45 war. The only known food plant for the larvae is Kidney Vetch, *Anthyllis vulneraria*, and it should be on the wing in June or possibly at the end of July and into early August. This is a small butterfly which can be overlooked. Look for warm sheltered spots where the food plant is present. Colonies can be very small in area



My last species is Northern Brown Argus, *Aricia artaxerxes*. In County Durham there are colonies in some of the Limestone quarries and on the coast. There has been one site found recently in the county at an undisclosed location. The food plant for the larvae is Rock Rose, *Helianthemum nummularian*, and the butterfly will be on the wing from early June until late July. Like the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, and Small Blue, this is a UK BAP Priority Species. As with the other species, warm, sunny days are best times to be out searching

If you come across any of these butterflies, or indeed of any others, please let me know, noting the grid reference, to six figures preferably, and how many were seen. Given the extreme rarity of the last two species, it would be extremely helpful if any sightings could be photographed and if I were contacted straightaway. I can be reached on 0191 285 8314 or at roger@norman784.plus.com. A spreadsheet for sightings can also be downloaded from our website a www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk

Photographs courtesy of Jim Asher, Butterfly Conservation.
Roger Norman, Northumberland Recorder

PLANT CORNER

I'll start with two species that you should find around in late May and early June. One of the most eye-catching flowers of wet grassland early in the season, which my wife insists on calling Milkmaid, is **Cuckooflower** or **Lady's Smock** (*Cardamine pratensis*). It is in the same genus as those various troublesome bittercress weeds in your garden, but it is quite a bit larger and more attractive.



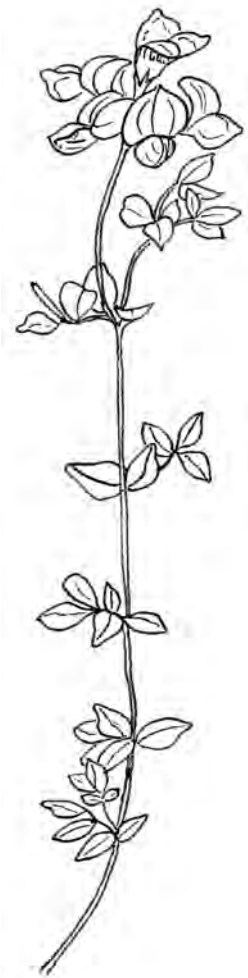
It traditionally comes into flower at the same time as the arrival of cuckoos in the different parts of the country. This year our first cuckoo at Titlington was on 20th April, but, probably due to the warm dry April, the cuckooflowers had been out for at least a week before that.



Common Bird's-foot-trefoil

(*Lotus corniculatus*) grows everywhere on short grassy areas where it is well-drained. Road verges on minor roads are often ideal and because it flowers from May right through to September it is very easy to find. The flowers are a deep orangey yellow often streaked with red, and are in heads of 2 to 7. It is often found growing prostrate along the surface, but sometimes is

more upright. It is usually almost hairless and its stems, if you break them, are not hollow in the centre. Plants found beside main roads are sometimes larger with paler flowers because they are an introduced variety, *sativa*.



Spring Flowers at Titlington Mount – an amazing April

The week starting Sunday 17 April was notable for spring flowers on the moorland and grazing fields at Titlington Mount.

- There was a quite sudden change from Wood Sorrel as the main white-flowered species on the bracken moorland to masses of Wood Anemone, but none of these Wood Anemones had the pink shades in the petals that have been obvious in previous years. Maybe the pink coloration is caused by environmental factors rather than genetics and in a year such as this when the warm weather has allowed rapid development and opening of the flowers, the pink doesn't have time to develop. Many of the individual flowers are also particularly large this year.



- This has been the best year for Lesser Celandine that we can remember with many areas in the grazing fields and on the banks of the Titlington Burn covered with them.
- Common Dog Violet and Barren Strawberry (*shown left*) were also prolific both in the fields and on the moorland.
- By 23rd April Tormentil, Thyme-leaved Speedwell and Heath Milkwort were all showing their first flowers.

Field trip to Otterburn Ranges, 7th May 2011.

Fifteen members met in the Otterburn Mill car park on a wet Saturday evening. Small flocks of sand martins buzzed over the car park as Chris Livsey gave a short introduction and the evening's programme. We headed off in a convey of cars.

The first stop was Stewartshields Plantation. This is a mixture of conifer and deciduous trees and shrubs that is used as an important training area for troops. One of the first birds was a tree pipit that sang close to the track. Other birds included lots of willow warblers, lesser redpolls, siskins and several crossbills. Evidence of otters was found around a fire pond, which also held large numbers of tadpoles including those of palmate newts.

After 20 minutes, we moved onto Yardhope, where there is a combination of open woodland, crags and ancient-semi natural woodland. The woodland comprised of a mixture downy birch, ash, alder and a small amount of sessile oak. Bird cherry was in flower on the fringes of the woodland. Ground flora included wood sorrel, wood anemone, and small numbers of bluebells, greater stitchwort and primrose. The first bird to appear was a peregrine, as the mist drifted across the moorland. Other species included stock dove, meadow pipit (although some thought it was a lot larger!), and wheatears were seen on open ground. The woodland contained a cuckoo, blackcap, many willow warblers, wren, robin and song thrush. A grey wagtail made its way upstream and pied wagtail was seen close to the farm along with many swallows.

The next stop was within the impact area at Wilkenhope. The landscape in this area is littered with 'dead' tanks, shell holes and observation points. Unfortunately, there was little wildlife to see with the exception of a kestrel, many meadow pipits and skylarks. Hare's tail cotton-grass was in full 'flower' on the mires and blanket bog.

The final stop was close to the First World War training trenches. On the way, there were good numbers of curlew, lapwing, and snipe close to the road. Unfortunately, there were no black grouse. Since the visit, the first official black grouse survey has been carried out by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and confirmed that there is only two males present on the Ranges. Red grouse, golden plover and displaying snipe were all heard to break the evening's silence. Forty species, of birds were seen.

The Group had an excellent evening in a part of Northumberland that is rarely visited. We were relieved that the heavy showers of the afternoon had passed and the sun had tried to shine through the clouds. Once again, thank you to Chris Livsey for taking the time to show us around Otterburn Ranges training area.

George Dodds



SIGHTINGS APRIL 2011

BIRDS

Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds (11th)
Canada Goose	2 at Mindrum (13th)
Shelduck	24 at Doddington (20th)
Shoveler	2 at Branton Ponds (11th)
Long-tailed Duck	12 off Stag Rocks (10th)
Goosander	70 at West Ord (26th)
Garganey	1 at Druridge Pools (12th)
Pintail	2 at Druridge Pools (12th)
Black Scoter	1 off Stag Rocks mid month (an extreme rarity from N America)
Sparrowhawk	1 at Alnwick (14th and 16th)
Buzzard	5 at Langleeford (17th) and 4 at Smeafield (16th)
Merlin	1 at Elwick (7th)
Peregrine	1 on Holy Island (24th), 1 at Smeafields(16th) and 3 at Harehope (2nd)
Osprey	1 at Brandon (7th) and 1 on the River Till (20th)
Goshawk	1 near Wooler (20th)
Grey Partridge	2 at Low Newton(7th)
Black Grouse	2 Grey Hens near Ingram (26th)
Ringed Plovers	4 at Branton Ponds (10th)
Golden Plovers	2 on Hedgehope (9th) and 42 on Alnwick Moor (19th)
Lapwing	26 at Doddington (20th)
Snipe	5 at East Lilburn (13th)
Water Rail	1 at Cresswell (2nd)
Common Sandpiper	4 at Branton Ponds 10th, 2 at Langlee (17th) and 1 River Breamish (21st)
Avocet	8 at Cresswell (12 th); a pair are now breeding there
Sanderling	40 at Seaton Point (25th)
Black-tailed Godwit	2 at Branton Ponds (22nd)
Kittiwake	100 at Dunstanburgh Castle (3rd)
Sandwich Tern	1 at Cresswell (3rd), 30 off Stag Rocks 10th and 10 at Newton Haven (7th)
Razorbill	60 at Dunstanburgh Castle (3rd)
Stock Dove	4 at Cresswell (5th)
Cuckoo	1 at Ingram on the 20th, 1 at Kettleburn (6 th), 1 at Harehope Hillend (19 th), 1 at Titlington Mount 20th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds (17th)
Green Woodpecker	1 at West Newton o (13th) and 1 at Harehope Hillend (18th) and (22nd)
Sand Martin	Max. 350 all month Branton Ponds and 30 at Stag Rocks (10th)
Swallow	Birds were seen at Powburn (2nd), Branton (9th), Swarland (10th), Ingram (14th), Titlington Mount (20th) and 240 at West Fenton (20th)
House Martin	1 at Druridge (5th) and 4 at Glanton (17th)
Tree Pipit	2 at West Newton (13th)
Whinchat	1 at the Hawsen Burn (22nd)
Wheatear	2 at Druridge (9th), 2 at Brough Law (3rd), 3 at Smeafield (6th), 26 at Fenham le Moor (17 th), 2 at Dunstanburgh (3rd) and 18 at Horncliffe (16th)
Shore Lark	1 at Druridge (5th)
Yellow Wagtail	1 at Cresswell (3rd) and (12th)
Black Redstart	1 at Druridge Pools (12th)

Ring Ouzel	2 at the Hawsen Burn (17th) and 22nd , 1 on Alnwick Moor (19th)
Redwing	3 at Horncliffe (16th)
Sedge Warbler	1 at Branton Ponds (20th) and 5 at Lesbury (30th)
Whitethroat	1 at Branton Ponds (26th)
Garden Warbler	1 on Holy Island (24th)
Blackcap	4 at West Newton (13th) and 2 at Swarland (17th)
Willow Warbler	1 at Branton Ponds (7th) and 1 at Smeafield on the (20th)
Wood Warbler	2 at Hepburn Woods (19th)
Subalpine Warbler	1 at Holy Island (10th)
Great Grey Shrike	1 at Shilbottle (14th)
Raven	2 in the Upper Breamish (9th)
Hooded Crow	1 at Holy Island (24th)
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Druridge Pools (12th), 4 at Budle Point (17 th), 3 at Lesbury (28th) and 1 at Fenham le Moor (24th)
Tree Sparrow	2 at Glanton (13th) and 3 at Swarland (25th)
Twite	Several at Druridge (5th)
Lesser Redpoll	2 at Branton Ponds (11th) and 8 at Old Bewick Hill (9th)
Corn Bunting	1 at Seaton Point (25th)

MAMMALS

Brown Hare	7 at Fenham le Moor (17th) and 1 at Swarland (24th)
Feral Goat	12 at West Newton (13th)
Stoat	1 at Swarland (5th)
Porpoise	1 off Stag Rocks (15th)
Red Squirrel	Singles seen at Hepburn Woods (19th), Smeafield (21st),Titlington Mount (10th) and Ingram all month

PLANTS

Cowslips	Budle (2nd)
Slender St John's Wort	West Newton (13th)

INVERTEBRATES

Orange Tip	Seen at Branton Ponds (14th), Harehope Hillend (17th), Smeafields (17th), Elwick Burn 17 th and Harehope 17th
Green Hairstreak	2 at Titlington Mount (28th)
Painted Lady	4 at Smeafield (21st)
Mountain Bumblebee	West Newton (13th)
Buff Tailed Bumblebee	West Newton (13th)
Early Bumblebee	West Newton (13th)
Red Tailed Bumblebee	Longframlington (date unknown)
Bee Fly	5 at Titlington Mount (8th)

REPTILES

Adder	1 at Branton Ponds (21st), also 1 baby Adder at Chevington (29th)
Slow Worm	1 at Harehope (25th) and 1 at Ingram (30th)
Viviparous Lizard	4 at Titlington Mount (21st)

AMPHIBIANS

Smooth Newt	Pair in garden pond Branton (27th)
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RAINFALL

The rainfall at Smeafield in April was 6.4 mm. In the last 21 years only June 1996 was drier.

OBSERVERS:W .Banks, J Brown ,D Clark, J Clark, I & K Davison, G Dodds, A Keeble, R Manning, R & J Poppleton, S Reay, M & B Rolley, S Sexton, S Wilson.

Please send May records, using sightings cards, by June 6th to Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton NE66 4LW or Tel:01665 578 357 or by hand at next meeting or email to redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Moths caught in my Howick Garden 01/04/11 – 22/04/11

Code	Taxon	Vernacular	Records	Individuals
464	<i>Plutella xylostella</i>	Diamond-back Moth	4	6
663	<i>Diurnea fagella</i>		8	15
670	<i>Depressaria daucella</i>		2	3
672	<i>Depressaria heraclei</i>	Parsnip Moth	2	2
688	<i>Agonopterix heracliana</i>		5	10
697	<i>Agonopterix arenella</i>		1	2
1055	<i>Acleris hyemana</i>		1	3
1398	<i>Nomophila noctuella</i>	Rush Veneer	1	1
1663	<i>Alsophila aescularia</i>	March Moth	2	2
1746	<i>Anticlea badiata</i>	Shoulder Stripe	4	5
1747	<i>Anticlea derivata</i>	Streamer	2	2
1750	<i>Lampropteryx suffumata</i>	Water Carpet	9	25
1775	<i>Colostygia multistrigaria</i>	Mottled Grey	1	1
1834	<i>Eupithecia vulgata</i>	Common Pug	1	1
1852	<i>Eupithecia abbreviata</i>	Brindled Pug	1	1
1853	<i>Eupithecia dodoneata</i>	Oak-tree Pug	1	1
1862	<i>Gymnoscelis rufifasciata</i>	Double-striped Pug	5	7
1917	<i>Selenia dentaria</i>	Early Thorn	8	12
1919	<i>Selenia tetralunaria</i>	Purple Thorn	1	1
1947	<i>Ectropis bistortata</i>	Engrailed	1	1
2006	<i>Pheosia gnoma</i>	Lesser Swallow Prominent	1	1
2063	<i>Diaphora mendica</i>	Muslin Moth	2	2
2078	<i>Nola confusalis</i>	Least Black Arches	1	1
2091	<i>Agrotis ipsilon</i>	Dark Sword-grass	2	2
2139	<i>Cerastis rubricosa</i>	Red Chestnut	10	28
2158	<i>Lacanobia thalassina</i>	Pale-shouldered Brocade	1	1
2179	<i>Panolis flammea</i>	Pine Beauty	6	10
2182	<i>Orthosia cruda</i>	Small Quaker	10	23
2186	<i>Orthosia gracilis</i>	Powdered Quaker	13	70
2187	<i>Orthosia cerasi</i>	Common Quaker	12	129
2188	<i>Orthosia incerta</i>	Clouded Drab	13	115
2189	<i>Orthosia munda</i>	Twin-spotted Quaker	2	2
2190	<i>Orthosia gothica</i>	Hebrew Character	14	431
2221	<i>Shargacucullia verbasci</i>	Mullein	1	1
2236	<i>Lithophane hepatica</i>	Pale Pinion	1	1
2243	<i>Xylocampa areola</i>	Early Grey	1	2
2256	<i>Eupsilia transversa</i>	Satellite	2	2
2258	<i>Conistra vaccinii</i>	Chestnut	4	7
			Total	929

Stewart Sexton, 2 Widows Row, Howick, NE66 3LG

Orchid notes

Many orchids, along with other plants, are flowering earlier this year. The harsh winter followed by the warmer than usual March and April seem to have prompted the early start. Our earliest orchid, the Early Purple (*Orchis mascula*), was already flowering in mid-April in the south and west, together, in Somerset, with Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) and Bird's Nest Orchids (*N. nidus-avis*), the latter an astonishing whole month earlier than usual. Things are not quite so advanced locally, but Early Purples were in flower on the Northumberland moors by the end of that month and appearing on the coast by early May. Common Twayblades are only just erupting here but Bird's Nest Orchids have recently appeared at a lightly shaded site near Newcastle. So the pattern is not uniform. However, the tiny Coralroot Orchids (*Corallorhiza trifida*) are already well out both inland and on the coast locally and are spectacular on Holy Island as we write (mid-May). Early Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*) were in flower inland by early May and these together with Northern Marsh Orchids (*D. purpurella*) are now beginning to flower in coastal dune slacks. One or two spikes of the latter are fully out. In a week or two's time these orchids should make an impressive display on Holy Island.

We can't finish without going out of the county and recording the spectacular flowering of the Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*) at a site open to the public in North Lancashire. This orchid, once common on calcareous soils and limestone pavement in Northern England, was driven to the verge of extinction largely by the depredations of 18th and 19th century collectors. However, Kew has been conducting a long term project to raise plants from seed from the one remaining native site. It took a long time to overcome the problems of germination, but eventually some 2000 seedlings were introduced to a number of locations where the orchid once flourished. Many of the seedlings failed for one reason or another, but one successful site was at Gait Barrows NNR, near Silverdale. Again flowering was 2 weeks earlier than usual this year but in future years a trip to the site in late May would be well rewarded by the display of these exquisite flowers in the wild.

Colin & Angela Scrutton



Coralroot Orchid



Early Marsh Orchid

Lady's Slipper



Northern Marsh Orchid



The Mullein Moth *Shargacucullia verbasci* in Northumberland.

The Mullein Moth or Mullein Shark, as it is sometimes known, is a particularly rare species in Northumberland.

This is a short note with reference to the species in VC68, North Northumberland, specifically, our garden in Howick Village.

In June 2009 we were lucky enough to find 15 caterpillars of the Mullein Moth feeding on Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* growing wild on our hardcore driveway. As there were about six large plants, the voracious larvae grew as the blooms became less. On checking the status of this moth I was interested to find that there had only been one previous Northumberland record, an adult trapped at Allerwash in 1997, so this was the first confirmed breeding record.

As these are a very well patterned and distinctive caterpillar it seems unlikely that they have just been overlooked.

By July the caterpillars had all gone, presumably to pupate underground.



In spring 2010 I was hoping to catch one of the emerging adults in my moth trap located in the same spot the moth had chosen to breed. Unfortunately this was unsuccessful and I assumed that so few larvae had either succumbed to the very cold winter or had been predated in the intervening months.

Almost forgotten about, it was with great surprise that, on 18th April 2011, I found a pristine, newly emerged Mullein Moth, settled on the cable to my trap, almost two years after the caterpillars had been present. Apparently it is not uncommon for this moth to 'miss' a year.



It is great to think that of only 17 individuals of this species having been recorded in the county, 16 have been in my garden! I would recommend that anyone who grows *Verbascum* in their garden to check them over in the summer, you never know...

Stewart Sexton 2 Widows Row, Howick NE66 3LG.