

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



## REVIEW OF JUNE 2011

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As spring moves into summer, July, can seem a relatively quiet month. A large proportion of the bird-breeding season is over. Auks such as Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin have taken their chicks off to the Farne Deeps and further a field. Tern chicks will fledge and start to fish for the first time. Large congregations of Mackerel will also start to appear. These shoals attract the great fishermen of the Bass Rock – Gannets. Gannets can put on some spectacular displays of fishing close to shore. One of the best places to see this can be the pier at Berwick upon Tweed. Up to 500 Gannets feeding at the mouth of the Tweed is a spectacular sight. The balmy evenings and flat calm seas of July are also a good time to start watching the sea. Manx Shearwaters can be seen relatively easily along with the odd Arctic Skua as it pursues terns and gulls. It can also be a good time to see Bottle-nosed Dolphins, Harbour Porpoise, Minke Whale and possibly Basking Sharks. Good places to watch are Bamburgh, Boulmer and Emmanuel Head on Lindisfarne.

On the coast, it can be a good time to look for Grayling and Dark Green Fritillary butterfly amongst the sand dunes. This is also a good time to look for Bloody Cranesbill (one of the special flowers of Northumberland) and Grass of Parnassus. The blood pink flowers of the cranesbills are easily recognisable. The true white flowers of the Grass of Parnassus can be found in the damper places on Lindisfarne and other dune systems. On the mud flats, there are very few waders at the start of the month. By the end of the month there will be a good numbers of Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatchers as well as smaller numbers of Knot, Bar-tailed Godwits and Dunlin. This is also the time of year when you are likely to see Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper and one or two rarer waders such as Pectoral Sandpiper. There is no better bird to be seen than the red summer plumage of the Knot or Black-tailed Godwit.

Further inland crops are starting to ripen. Lapwing and Curlew have started to return to the coast. It is a good time to look for returning Green Sandpiper and Greenshank on the rivers Breamish, Till and Coquet. Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails start to congregate in flocks. Where there is flowering Ragwort, look out for nectaring Cinnabar and the Burnet moths. These are very attractive day-flying moths and relatively easy to identify.

In the garden, this is the best time of year to see moths. A moth trap in a very small garden in Glanton can attract up to 50 moths of 20 species. Larger traps in good habitat can attract 400+ macro moths. Some of our most spectacular moths are on the wing such as the Elephant Hawkmoth and the Garden Tiger. Elephant Hawkmoths are attracted to the flowers of Honeysuckle. If you don't have a moth trap try making some moth food using red wine, bananas and treacle. This mixture can be soaked into string or rope or spread out onto an old stump. If the conditions are right, you should get some very good views of some very special nighttime visitors.

Enjoy the weather and our British wildlife.

*Jack Daw.*

### **HANNAH'S HILL WALK. – 4<sup>TH</sup>. JUNE 2011.**

Ten members set out from Harehope Hillend on a pleasantly, warm and bright morning, after first checking the bird feeders, and seeing Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Siskin, Nuthatch as well as Chaffinch, Dunnock, Robin, Great and Blue Tits.

Hannah's Wood is very mixed and open, with some very old trees. Snow damage, especially to Scots Pine and Oak was noted and we saw Sanicle in flower on a damper part of the path, as well as Chickweed Wintergreen, Climbing Corydalis and an area covered with Gaultheria, probably planted originally for Pheasant feed.. Blackcap, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaff were singing. A Green Woodpecker gave a very subdued warning call as it made its escape and a Bullfinch called. We were lucky enough to see a Red Squirrel.

The lack of natural regeneration in the Junipers was discussed and the thought was that the treading effect of livestock would be of benefit. To replace natural regeneration, Natural England have grown replacement plants from the Harehope Junipers, which are been planted in various areas of the wood with mixed results.

The “Leper Bath” on Harehope Hill was the next stop and it was interesting to see “clinker” remaining from medieval iron smelting. Two Lapwing were seen, the first to breed here for some time and only since the conversion of some arable land to grassland which managed without fertiliser or chemicals.

A group of approx 80 Heath Spotted Orchids were seen just coming into flower. Redpoll were heard by the Harehope Burn, Linnet and Whinchat were seen on the edge of Old Bewick Hill, and a Kestrel flew high overhead.

The walk ended as a very pleasant social gathering and it was especially good to have some younger members as part of the group.

*Jim Clark.*

## **Meeting of Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May**

A rather small audience of 25 gathered in an echoing hall (curtains being cleaned!). George publicised Jim Clark’s field visit to Harehope on 4th June and the first meeting of the new season in September which will be Nick Mason talking about Red Squirrels. The new programme cards should be ready in July.

George’s specimens, several courtesy of members, were: 2 moth identification guides; a Puss Moth photo from Bamburgh; a splendid live Poplar Hawk Moth (photo right); a Song Thrush window casualty from Foxton; a female Yellowhammer; a limestone slab from Cocklawburn with fossilised worm tracks; and what seemed like half a cherry tree from Branton with an old woodpecker hole, most recently used by nesting tree sparrows.



*Photo Stewart Sexton.*

Members discussed various recent sightings, plus things to look out for in June. Then George introduced Alastair Lavery who gave a presentation on *The River Till Wetland Restoration Project*.

The Till Valley north and east of Wooler is a large flood plain with more than 30km of flood defence dykes. But the floods of 2008 and 2009 showed that the dykes often tend to make matters worse because once the fields are flooded the dykes prevent water draining back into the river, so keeping the farmland under water for longer than necessary. Given that there is now neither money nor enthusiasm for maintaining the dykes in a good condition, planned breaches have been agreed with the landowners, with water levels then controlled by sluices, some with windmill water pumps, which will be maintained by the farmers.

The main areas of work have been in the Fenton, Nesbit and Doddington areas, where the farmers will actually get increased use of water-meadow grazings than before. It is also hoped that good new areas of wetland habitat will be created. In addition there is increasing emphasis on access and educational use. It seemed excellent that this project had attracted so many partner organisations, so much funding and such a good level of co-operation from landowners.

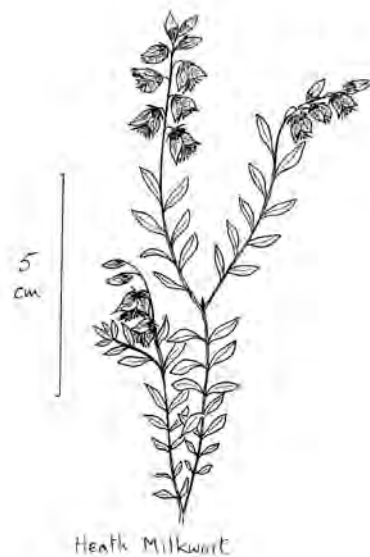
## PLANT CORNER

Over the recent Bank Holiday weekend I signed up for four days of botanical recording in the Wooler area. Those who attended the talk by Chris Metherell in March about the new On-line Flora of North Northumberland, which is being developed, will realise that this flora can't be produced without current surveys of the 400+ tetrads (2km square areas) that we have in our part of the County. One of the botanists who came was from Cambridge and I was in the same small group as him when we surveyed Fowberry Moor. He was an experienced botanist and a good deal more proficient than me, but when we found **Heath Milkwort** (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) he was quite excited because this was an unusual species for him. Then when we came across **Lousewort** (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) he was really delighted because he had never seen it before. That made me realise how easy it is to become blasé about species that are fairly common here but very unusual elsewhere, particularly in lowland areas.

**Heath Milkwort** is a perennial belonging to the small family *Polygalaceae*, devoted, at least in Britain, solely to Milkworts.



Our species is small, rarely exceeding 10cm, and is a plant of acid moors and heaths. Our local hill has four colour morphs – deep blue, pale blue, pink and white, although the deep blue is most common. If you look closely at the flowers you will see that the 'petals' are actually two coloured leaf-like bracts and they create a flattening effect with the true flower parts pressed between them.



The name 'milkwort' comes from an old belief that they enriched pasture and improved milk production. A second species, Common Milkwort (*P. vulgaris*), differs from our plant in having all its leaves alternate (rather than the lower ones being opposite). In Northumberland you may find it more commonly in coastal turf and it often grows taller than *P. serpyllifolia*.

**Lousewort** is a perennial plant of wetter areas of acid moors and heaths. It grows to a maximum height of about 25cm, though is often much smaller. Like a number of other



members of its family, *Scrophulariaceae*, it is a partial parasite. This means it grows with its host plants (various grasses) and draws food from their roots, but can still carry out its own photosynthesis.



Lousewort flowers from April to July and the pinkish purple flowers are pollinated by bumble bees. The vase-shaped calyx of sepals is hairless (glabrous) and the upper hooded petal has two small side teeth. A taller related species, Marsh Lousewort (*P. palustris*) is sometimes called Red Rattle and you should

look for the four side teeth on the upper petal to be sure you've got the Marsh species.

	<b>SIGHTINGS MAY 2011</b>
<b>BIRDS</b>	
Little Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on the 13th
Spoonbill	4 at Druridge Pools on the 21st
Whooper Swan	2 at Branton Ponds on the 20th
Brent Goose	2 at Fenham Flats on the 15th
Shelduck	6 at Branton Ponds on the 18 <sup>th</sup> with 7 young
Gadwall	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on the 23rd
Garganey	2 at Druridge Pools on the 10th
Merlin	2 Upper Coquet 14th
Peregrine	1 at Elwick on the 15 <sup>th</sup> and 1 at Fenham Flats on the 15th
Marsh Harrier	2 at East Chevington all month
Osprey	1 at Branton Ponds on the 25th
Goshawk	1 near Alnwick 25 <sup>th</sup> and 1 near Wooler 27th
Red Grouse	2 near P.O.Pylon on the 18th
Ringed Plover	570 at Fenham Flats on the 15th
Golden Plover	60+ at Budle Bay on the 21st
Grey Plover	22 Elwick on the 15 <sup>th</sup> and 440 at Fenham Flats on the 15th
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on the 4th
Temmincks Stint	1 at Beadnell Flash on the 10th
Avocet	Up to 6 all month at Cresswell Pond
Sanderling	35 at Elwick on the 15th
Whimbrel	4 at Fenham Flats on the 15th
Terek Sandpiper	1 at Hauxley from 28 <sup>th</sup> to 30th
Ruff	4 at Druridge Pools on the 9th
Common Tern	2 at Branton Ponds 8 <sup>th</sup> and 8 at East Chevington on the 31st
Arctic Tern	5 at East Chevington on the 31st
Little Tern	2 at Long Nanny on the 2nd
Roseate Tern	1 at East Chevington on the 31st
White Winged Black Tern	1 at East Chevington on the 11th
Little Gull	5 at Esat Chevington on the 29 <sup>th</sup> and 4 on the 31st
Common Crane	1 at Beadnell Flash on the 10th
Cuckoo	Single birds at Ford 7 <sup>th</sup> ,Kimmer Lough 17 <sup>th</sup> ,Holystone Woods 29 <sup>th</sup> and Beanley Woods 30th
Tawny Owl	A chick at Dovecrag Burn on the 17th
Yellow Wagtail	1 at Townfoot on the 22nd
Wood Sandpiper	2 at Branton Ponds 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 1 at Beadnell Flash 10th
Wryneck	1 at Holy Island on the 4th
Tree Pipit	1 at West Harle on the 13th
Redstart	1 Harthope 19 <sup>th</sup> ,3 Holystone Woods 1 <sup>st</sup> ,2 West Harle 13 <sup>th</sup> ,1 Holystone 29 <sup>th</sup> and 2 at Old Bewick on the 3rd
Whinchat	2 at Belford Moor on the 7th
Stonechat	2 at Alnwick Moor on the 19th
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Ford 7 <sup>th</sup> ,1 at Branton Ponds 27 <sup>th</sup> ,2 at Horncliffe 5 <sup>th</sup> ,and 1 at Chatton 7th
Garden Warbler	Several around Branton Ponds on the 8th
Spotted Flycatcher	1 the Harthope 19 <sup>th</sup> ,1 in Powburn 25 <sup>th</sup> and 2 in Swarland 20th

Raven	1 Upper Coquet 14 <sup>th</sup> and 2 in the Belford area 13 <sup>th</sup>
Hooded Crow	1 at Newton Links on the 19 <sup>th</sup>
Tree Sparrow	1 at Swarland all month
Siskin	4 at Harehope Hillend on the 10 <sup>th</sup>
Crossbill	8 in Beanley Woods on the 30 <sup>th</sup>
Lesser Redpoll	1 at Kimmer Lough on the 17 <sup>th</sup>
<b>MAMMALS</b>	
Red Squirrel	1 at Branton on the 8 <sup>th</sup>
Otter	1 at Branton Ponds on the 17 <sup>th</sup>
Brown Hare	1 at Swarland 27 <sup>th</sup> and 14 at Horncliffe on the 5 <sup>th</sup>
Water Vole	2 at Branton Ponds on the 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>PLANTS</b>	
Spring Squill	At Cullernose Point on the 4 <sup>th</sup>
Early Purple Orchid	At East Lilburn on the 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Early Marsh Orchid	At East Lilburn on the 8 <sup>th</sup> and Lindisfarne on the 9 <sup>th</sup>
Northern Marsh Orchid	At Lindisfarne on the 9 <sup>th</sup>
Common Spotted Orchid	At Esat Lilburn on the 27 <sup>th</sup>
Cowslips	At Harehope Hillend on the 10 <sup>th</sup>
Troillus	At East Lilburn on the 11 <sup>th</sup>
Celery Leaved Buttercup	At East Lilburn on the 27 <sup>th</sup>
<b>INVERTEBRATES</b>	
Red Admiral	At Fenham Flats on the 15 <sup>th</sup>
Large Skipper	3 at Haggerston on the 26 <sup>th</sup> and 1 at Hauxley on the 31 <sup>st</sup>
Garden Tiger Moth	At Windmill Hill on the 9 <sup>th</sup>
Latticed Heath Moth	At Kyloe Hills on the 25 <sup>th</sup>
Mason Wasp	At Cullernose Point on the 4 <sup>th</sup>
Black Medicinal Leech	At Lindisfarne on the 9 <sup>th</sup>
<b>REPTILES/ AMPHIBIANS</b>	
Slow Worm	1 at Branton on the 18 <sup>th</sup>
Common Newts	At Lindisfarne on the 9 <sup>th</sup>
<b>OBSERVERS:</b> L.Capper, J & E Clark, I & K.Davison, G.Dodds, A.Keeble, R.Manning, M&B.Rolley, S.Sexton, H.Tindale	
Please send sightings reports for June no later than 6 <sup>th</sup> July to Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton, Powburn, NE66 4LW or Tel: 01665 578 357 or email to <a href="mailto:redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk">redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk</a>	