NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus at Etal – 15th May 2016

For once, the sun was shining, even at the early hour of 5.00am. It was ten years since the Dawn Chorus had been at Etal and the report from 2006 tells us that this had been the first occasion when we had heard the song of the Nuthatch. How things have changed.

The sunshine meant that the birds were enjoying a good start to their day. It was not too long before we heard a Nuthatch in the trees around Etal Castle, although right from the start it was the Wren that dominated our morning. A collection of Wrens is a Chime, but this presumably refers to their winter flocking rather than a strong healthy breeding population. Throughout our entire morning, the song was everywhere, often from heights that one does not readily associate with this tiny bird. It seemed that the sunshine had made them move higher in the trees.

Our route took us through the village, where a Spotted Flycatcher showed at the tip of a conifer alongside a Robin perched on an adjacent tip, allowing us to get a good comparison between the two species, before we walked up to the edge of Etal Manor gardens, out into the fields and down to the River Till. As we approached, a roe deer barked vigorously, a Reed Bunting sat obligingly on the telephone wires above us, a Whitethroat on a hedge rewarded Fiona for (wo)manfully carrying her telescope on her back and a Garden Warbler gave a long aria in the alto range that might have impressed Gareth Malone.

We sat or stood in the sunshine beside the river at the point where the children of Ford School designed and erected a wildlife panel on the Sustrans cycle path. Sitting on the bench here for 10-15 minutes is rewarding at any time. A pair of beautiful Grey Wagtails was busy on the opposite bank and a Long-tailed Tit was equally busy in the large willow trees beside us.

Returning along the river towards Etal we passed the mysterious St. Mary’s Well before climbing up to cross the Berwick road and make our way to the gardens at the Manor. Whether by design or accident, Lady Joicey had opened the front door of the house so that the waft of bacon hit us on the way past. We resisted it in order to admire the colours of the rhododendrons, azaleas, tulips, maples, crab apple blossom and copper beech, spotting a tiny Goldcrest at the top of a conifer. Then we felt that we should return to the open front door…

Lady Joicey is very grateful to everyone for their generous donations (£72) to her charity basket which will be divided between two causes with which she is closely involved. We had recorded 46 species during the course of our wanderings.

*Mute Swan, Mallard, Pheasant, Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swift, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting*