

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus Report 2017 - Slainsfield, Sunday 14th May

There was a record turn-out of 27 members for the 24th Ford & Etal Dawn Chorus, when we saw and heard a record number of 53 species.

A clear dawn followed light overnight rain. We soon had the chance to study a female Crossbill in the Scots Pines close to our starting point, and then to compare the songs of two similar species; firstly the languid tune of the Blackbird compared to the more urgent song of the Mistle Thrush, followed by the scratchy, chaotic song of the Common Whitethroat alongside the simpler one-note trill of the Lesser Whitethroat. Yellowhammers and Linnets love the gorse bushes in these parts and we were able to study them at close range. We soon gained a bit of height, climbing past the Centenary Wood, a collection of oaks planted in 2008 in the form of a large Roman 'C' to commemorate 100 years of ownership by the Joicey family. Turning to take in the views to the west, to the Cheviots and Eildons and Moorfoots, the skies were already brightening, bringing us sunshine though still a cool breeze. Here was another chance to compare similar songs: the busy Blackcap against the slower, more *alto* pitched, longer-phrased Garden Warbler. Moving down onto the moor, a Long-Tailed Tit was busily flitting between the thorn bushes and a drooping branch of a Scots Pine – probably a nest was hidden from our view. A pair of Curlew flew silently off and a Willow Warbler gave us a true solo performance whilst we were sheltered from the wind. Then an Oystercatcher was spotted feeding amongst the sheep. Along with the Mistle Thrush, the Oystercatcher is the first harbinger of spring hereabouts, arriving at its inland breeding grounds in early February, long before the Chiffchaff arrives. Surrounded by the song of Skylarks and the display flights of Meadow Pipits, a small flock of Lesser Redpolls was feasting on the birch trees above the pond and a final frantic search for a Wheatear proved fruitful as we left the moor through the main gate. Moving down to Etal, and before breakfast, we walked through the gardens of Etal Manor where the botanical knowledge of some members was as impressive as their ornithological knowledge. Several typical house-and-garden-based species were added to our list, such as Nuthatch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and House Martin. Buns filled with bacon and sausage and scrambled egg were ready by that time and it was nice to sit down and enjoy them with unending refills of coffee and tea. It was another happy and enjoyable Dawn Chorus, prompting our visitor from Dorset – an intrepid walker – to admit that she had never before walked so short a distance in so long a time, and yet learned so much!

Finally, Harriet would like to thank everyone for their very generous donations (£126) at breakfast, in aid of local charity work, and I am already looking forward to our Silver Anniversary Dawn Chorus next year!

JJ

Species recorded: Mallard, Grey Partridge, Pheasant, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Curlew, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Tawny Owl, Swift, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Wheatear, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Crossbill, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting