

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus Report 2018 - Ford Moss, Sunday 20th May

This is surely the Year of the Chiffchaff. All across our area the sharp staccato ‘chiff-chaff-chiff-chiff-chaff’ of the bird is a universal feature. There was probably not a single moment of this year’s Dawn Chorus when a Chiffchaff was not audible.

Taking a slightly different approach to Ford Moss, we started at the former shepherd’s cottage and slowly climbed up to look southwards onto the Moss itself and the old Caledonian pines beyond. The gorse bushes were alive with Yellowhammers, Linnets and Meadow Pipits whilst a large patch of rushes above the main circular track contained a loud, boisterous Sedge Warbler who obligingly sang from the single small hawthorn bush in the middle. It gave us all fabulous views of a bird that is often a little more secretive in nature. In a large oak tree nearby, a Great Spotted Woodpecker had a beakful of goodies for its young.

Another species with tremendous volume is the Whitethroat. A few of these were evident in the scrub-land between the Moss and the road, showing us their elliptical display flight.

A special sight was that of two young foxes moving silently through the grasses out on the Moss, no doubt searching for nests or small mammals.

The Dawn Chorus always ends with a visit to the woodland gardens at Etal Manor, providing the opportunity to add a few more species to our list for the morning. This year it made a considerable difference to the final tally, our trip around Ford Moss having been on the thin side statistically. Swifts, House Martins, Nuthatches, Long-Tailed Tits and Coal Tits made up the body of the choir at Etal. There was an opportunity to compare the ‘see-saw-see-saw’ of the Coal Tit with the ‘chiff-chaff’ of The Bird Of The Year. A high ‘tseep’, repeated from amongst the branches of a Swamp Cypress, revealed a Treecreeper, and almost at the end of our tour the first (for most of us) of this summer’s Spotted Flycatchers appeared.

However, for most of the 19 members who joined in this year’s Dawn Chorus, it was hard to know where to concentrate one’s attention... Was it on the birds or was it on the beautiful colours of the Rhododendrons and Azaleas? This year’s event being a week later than usual, the colours were really at their peak and matters botanical were just as widely debated as matters ornithological. On the latter point, the final score was 45 species seen or heard.

Home-grown roe venison sausages, Etal eggs and some excellent bacon from Foreman’s the butcher in Norham were piled high on platters and washed down with industrial quantities of coffee and tea, all courtesy of Harriet in the kitchen. Such was the generosity of everyone that she is able to pass the magnificent sum of £110 to a charity with which she is connected, and says a very special ‘Thank You’ to everyone.

Greylag Goose, Mallard, Pheasant, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Moorhen, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting