

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus Report 2019 - Tindal House, Sunday 12th May

Rosemary Bell has a wonderful knack of knowing these things. Nobody else (not even your host!) had appreciated that this was the 25th Dawn Chorus on Ford & Etal. Although we are all older, and few of us probably any the wiser about the birds we love and enjoy, this morning's walk did at least show that, 25 years on, we are all still fit, can climb a very steep hill and can scramble over a stile. It surely proves that long-term membership of the NNBC gives access to the Fountain of Youth. [Now that's a marketing strapline ...]

A lot has changed in the last 25 years. Birds of prey were much more frequently seen, whilst our circumambulations of Ford Moss used to reveal Cuckoos, Curlews and Snipe. By contrast, birds now considered relatively *ordinaire*, such as the Nuthatch and Greylag Goose, were virtual rarities and only a fortnight ago the first Ring-necked Parakeet arrived in Etal village.

Each of our 25 Dawn Choruses has had its moments. This year – the 5th and 10th anniversaries of previous visits to Tindal House – provided grandstand seats for us to appreciate how powerful the voices of small birds are. Surrounded by 45 hectares of gloriously blooming Oilseed Rape – which should yield enough to fill 90,000 litre bottles of rapeseed oil – we had the opportunity to hear at close range the song of the Dunnock, a bird that is often overlooked and undervalued. Its tonal range is very narrow but it produces a lovely sweet sharp burst of song. Later, we watched another pair, their beaks full of insects, waiting for us to move on so that they could get in to their young.

We stood under a bush from which, at very close hand, a Willow Warbler gushed out its sweet strong scale-descending song. But by far the most *virtuoso* performance came from a Blackcap, somewhere at the top of a tree – and as far as can be recalled it remained unseen by anyone. The power and clarity of its beautiful song made us stand in awe and wonder for several minutes. The Blackcap is 'up there' with the best of any summer bird song.

A frosty, cold but extraordinarily clear morning had warmed up into a lovely sunny one by the time we made our way to Etal Manor. Despite being a week earlier than last year, the woodland gardens were less full of colour, thanks to the frosts of late April – and not forgetting how the winter storms of early 2018 had delayed things. A tour through the gardens allowed us to record a good number of species that we would not have noted earlier in the morning. Then it was time for the by-now traditional breakfast, in which locally-made sausages and eggs from the Etal hens were a prominent feature, enjoyed around tables onto which (thanks to Rosemary of course!) small silver-coloured '25' confetti had been liberally scattered.

Harriet, recently installed as the High Sheriff of Northumberland for the year 2019-2020, is immensely grateful for the contributions (totalling £182) towards the High Sheriff's Fund – which makes grants to organisations across Northumberland that help young people to make a solid start in life and thus avoid the slippery slope that lands them in trouble. And I add my own thanks for a wonderful card and bottle of champagne which Graham and Rosemary presented.

Greylag Goose, Mallard, Goosander, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer. [46 species]