

## NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus 2021

*Slainsfield, Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 - 05.00-08.45*

When I sit down to write the report of the annual Dawn Chorus on Ford & Etal I usually start by looking back at experiences from previous years. Last year's 'Dawn Chorus With A Difference' may have been 'different' for an obvious reason but it is also striking to read that virtually all our summer visitors had arrived by the much earlier date (9<sup>th</sup> May), in contrast to this year's prolonged spell of cold, dampness and easterly winds. A solitary Swift over Etal Manor at the end of the morning this year was the first noted here and we did not record a single Spotted Flycatcher, both of which had appeared ten days earlier in 2020.

In the nation's mind, Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May had long promised to be a light at the end of a dismal dark tunnel. It was therefore a privilege for eleven of us to meet at Slainsfield at 5.00am, proud that the North Northumberland Bird Club was one of the very first groups in the country to meet 'legally' – if not the very first. How often it is said: where Northumberland leads, others follow...

We were rewarded with a dry and bright morning and were welcomed by a Cuckoo just before the off. Although we have been able – and very fortunate – to get out into the countryside through the past year and more, it was a special pleasure to be together and chat.

From Slainsfield we climbed up to Watchlaw before turning left to enter Etal Moor from the north, returning past the pond. We found it virtually impossible to resolve whether the bird parachuting onto a hawthorn tree was a Tree Pipit or a Meadow Pipit, so we erred on the side of caution. Bullfinches were more numerous than in previous years and we were treated to a magnificent view of a Jay flying a considerable distance across the moor, the blue of its wings making a real show against the backdrop of bright yellow gorse. The relative tameness of the Greylag Geese on the pond reflects the fact that those individuals who spend the summer here are not the lazy ones who cannot be bothered to fly north to the Arctic but are descendants of feral geese released in the 1970s/1980s onto the gravel ponds of the Midlands and who, along with Canada Geese, are slowly spreading northwards. A distant view of a lovely male Stonechat on the moor was the precursor to a lovely view of Siskins in the garden at Etal Manor, where the paucity of colour amongst the rhododendrons and azaleas is another sign of the cold slow spring.

After Harriet had been warmly thanked for delicious bacon, sausages, eggs, rolls, juice, tea and coffee, the rollcall (of 47 species) was made, and the chat continued.

It almost feels like the good old days may be coming back ...

*JJ*

*Species seen / heard:* Greylag Goose, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Pheasant, Herring Gull, Buzzard, Kestrel, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Swift, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting