

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus 2022

Etal, Sunday 15th May 2022 - 05.30-09.15

Last year I ended my report with the words: “It almost feels like the good old days may be coming back ...” Well, this year the good old days really were back, with 22 keen members and ‘interlopers’ arriving at Etal Castle for a start at 05.30.

The early morning mist was hanging low but already the sun promised a good start to the 26th Annual Dawn Chorus. Lying nearby was a stack of hardwood timber cleared after Storm Arwen. The clear-up across the estate will take two years, with 18,000 tonnes of fallen timber to pick up, representing some 12% of the entire timber stock. Mature Scots Pine has been the major casualty, a species that is the home of the Red Squirrel. Clearance and new plantings will of course affect the landscape and, through that, the species mix that lives there; we shall certainly see some changes in the birds and flowers that we come to expect. Space and light are the elements at play; we saw several Treecreepers and Nuthatches throughout the morning, taking advantage of so many breaks and cracks in trees.

Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were everywhere; 2022 seems to be ‘their year’. Down on the river, a stately Grey Heron stood motionless by the weir. Further downstream its colleague had adopted an altogether different pose, crouched over a shallow bed of stones, its dagger bill darting in to spear the minnows. Screeching Mistle Thrushes and ‘pinking’ Blackbirds in the trees along the bank alerted us that something was amiss: a Tawny Owl flew up into a tree and tried to look inconspicuous. Piping Common Sandpipers gave a fly-past in both directions and a Moorhen gently jerked and prodded at the reeds and grasses.

It wasn’t clear who got the greater shock when a cock Pheasant sprang out of the long grass just inches from a pair of boots in the margin of an arable field. Just further along the first Common Whitethroat was recorded, a species whose arrival seems to vary quite a lot hereabouts. A solitary Swift flew fast across the open field, perhaps still on its journey to its breeding site.

Dropping down into the woodland garden at Etal Manor we entered yet another habitat of shrubs and cultivar trees, where almost the first bird to greet us was the high-pitched Goldcrest. There is always something to grab the attention in this garden; this year it was the spectacular numbers of tiny dark purple downward-pointing cones of a stately conifer tree, the identity of which has never formally been settled. A Siskin zipped overhead, a Pied Wagtail scuttled back and forth, and almost the last species to be recorded before breakfast was a Spotted Flycatcher.

Another superb breakfast was enjoyed and a rollcall of 49 – no, 50 – no, 48 ... was read out, leaving me to go through Fiona’s notes to ascertain the correct number. It is indeed 49! See below.

Harriet would like to thank everyone for their very generous donations (£170) which will be divided between Hospice Care North Northumberland and Siobhan’s Trust, a small charity working very hard on the Polish/Ukrainian border.

A final ‘plug’ that the gardens will be open again on Sunday 16th October under the National Gardens Scheme with some wonderful autumn foliage colours.

JJ

Species seen / heard: Greylag Goose, Mallard, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Tawny Owl, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, 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, Treecreeper, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer.