

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus 2023

Ford West Woods, Saturday 29th April 2023 - 05.30-09.15

This was the earliest date on which the Dawn Chorus at Ford & Etal has been held and what a difference the next 10-14 days should make! Not only is it darker at 05.30 at the end of April but winter migrants are still passing through and only a few of the summer visitors have arrived.

A keen group of 13 members were first treated to the sight of a large colony of Pipistrelle Bats, wheeling and diving as they got ready for bed. A Tawny Owl gave a few 'good night' hoots in the distance as he too prepared for his rest.

The distant sight of eight hares, all close together in a line and eating contentedly, was unusual and on the edge of the large former bog field a number of Fieldfares and Redwings were alternately feeding on the ground and flying up to enjoy the view from a tall Scots Pine – amongst the last of the winter visitors to fly back north.

The damage wreaked by Storm Arwen in 2021 has opened up large areas of once dense conifer woodland, letting in light and air. Birds and other species are taking full advantage, Wrens in particular thriving in the turmoil of upturned tree roots and piles of branches, a scene that resembles the aftermath of a battlefield in WW1.

On an oxbow lake, formed out of a previous meander of the River Till, we enjoyed a moment of amusement when a male Mute Swan set off to attack a male Canada Goose, thrashing and lunging along the water with definite intent on inflicting some form of GBH if he could but catch it. The Canada sought refuge out on the grassy bank but was then caught in a snooker when he spotted 13 Bird Club members walking towards him. Diplomats that we are, we gave way, and he remained on dry land.

Fittingly, several Willow Warblers were warbling in the Willows by the riverbank, along with a Blackcap, an enthusiastic Sedge Warbler and the ubiquitous Chiffchaffs. And maybe, just maybe, a very distant Cuckoo ...?

After the customary circuit of the woodland garden at Etal Manor in which we added several species including Greenfinch, Tree and House Sparrow, and Naked Ladies all in a bed, our Bird Club breakfast was enjoyed and the rollcall of the 42 species seen was read out.

Harriet thanks everyone for the very generous donations which totalled £85 and which will be passed to the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. The black sheep of Etal (once known as St Kilda but now known as Hebridean) were one of the founder flocks of the Trust when it was established 50 years ago. She would like to add a 'plug' that Peter Pan will be played in the gardens on Saturday 26th August (tickets through HospiceCare North Northumberland).

JJ

Species seen / heard: Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard, Goosander, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Moorhen, Lapwing, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Tawny Owl, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting.