

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus at Ford & Etal

Sunday 11th May 2025

The sun rose at 5.00am, a ball of blinding pink clashing with the fluorescent yellow of the oilseed rape in front of us. It heralded one of the most beautiful mornings in the whole history of the annual Dawn Chorus walks at Ford & Etal, this one being the 32nd to be precise. It was particularly good to meet new faces amongst the already 'weel-kent hardy annuals'. From the magnificent oak trees at Tindal House Farm we moved towards the river, through fields of rippling barley, watching numerous Hares, with Tree Sparrows and Yellowhammers along the large hawthorn hedges. As we approached the wood with its fringe of blackthorn, there was plenty of noise from the warbler family: Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Blackcap, and finally a Garden Warbler. The view from the gate into the steep grass field down to the river was stunning, and we recorded many wild flowers as we descended. The sun had risen enough by this point so that mist was curling up off the river; against the light it was a truly magical sight. The river is low after the dry weather so it was quiet, allowing us to hear species in the ancient semi-natural woodland above us as well as those on the riverbank. A fledgling Dipper stood preening itself on a rock, its grey-green plumage dull in comparison to the rich dark chocolate brown and crisp white bib of its parent. A brood of Dippers usually comprises three youngsters who all disperse to different places, close enough for the adult to be able to reach them. A flash of a Kingfisher (repeated a little later as it darted back downstream) and a plentiful number of Mallard enjoying the sunshine, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sand Martins and Siskins were all around us, and then suddenly – out of nowhere – a solitary Barnacle Goose flew overhead. The old stile at the top of the hill tested the agility of our senior members – triumphantly – before we walked along the arable fields again to our cars, transferring to Etal Manor to enjoy a walk through the woodland garden. Here, the first Spotted Flycatcher had arrived and a Jay flitted through the trees on a couple of occasions. We watched a Buzzard sitting on a pole under attack from an angry Mistle Thrush before it flapped away up the hill. The Swifts had just arrived, too, to join the Swallows and House Martins. Another ornithological summer is finally complete. The colours in the garden were magnificent against a cloudless blue sky; Harriet hopes that these will last until the garden is open for a fundraising event for the Northumberland Hospice on Sunday 15th June. We shall see.

Once again, a very convivial breakfast was enjoyed and a round of applause given to Harriet for her skills with the frying pan. The list of species was read: we had 49. However, a report of a Grey Partridge on the verge of the road in to Tindal House was readily accepted and we can therefore report The Full 50, though as always there were some surprising omissions.

Harriet thanks everyone for their most generous contributions to her bowl for local charities: the wonderful sum of £226.

Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Barnacle Goose, Mallard, Grey Partridge, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Kingfisher, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, 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, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Yellowhammer