



# HARROGATE & DISTRICT NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Supporting:

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Botanical Society of the British Isles      British Trust for Ornithology  
Yorkshire Naturalists' Union      Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Ltd.  
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## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2012



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, the first year of my term as President is nearly over. Those of you who attend the winter meetings have probably noticed that I am neither a natural leader, nor a gifted orator, nor an efficient organiser. I am, however, the only person who was daft enough to volunteer for the role!

Spring is here and it is a magical time of year for everybody with an interest in nature. The buds are bursting, Sand Martins will be skimming the water at Farnham and the first butterflies will soon be on the wing. The great thing about being a naturalist is that there is always something of interest to see, regardless of the time of year, but spring is special.

Meanwhile at HDNS, it has been a busy year for Council. One of the most important tasks had been the formulation of Health and Safety rules for Farnham work parties – a pain in the backside for all concerned, but we felt it was necessary to minimise the risks and indeed cover ourselves just in case the unthinkable happens.

Will Rich and I have also been engaged in organizing a programme of field trips and winter indoor meetings. We hope you will approve of the events we have planned for the next twelve months. Something I would like to stress is that if you wish to join a field trip, but are unable or do not want to drive, please do not let this be a deterrent. We will do our best to arrange shared transport and you can contact me in the first instance. It would be appreciated if anybody who is driving to a field trip and has a spare place in their car would let me know.

One thing we are keen to resurrect at some time in the future is a members' evening. The idea is that several members will show a small number of slides or digital images and talk briefly about their wildlife experiences. In order for this to succeed we need a few of you, the members, to step forward! No date has been fixed yet and it might not happen until the winter after next, but please give the matter some consideration and watch this space for further details.

Enjoy the newsletter and I look forward to seeing some of you on the forthcoming field trips.

**David Tipping**

## FORESTS, WOODLANDS & PLANNING

In late March the Government published a new set of planning policies, called the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). These new policies now guide planning decisions throughout England. Although the NPPF retains phrasing from existing planning policy around the protection of ancient woods and trees, the wording that planning applications should not bring about the loss of these habitats 'unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss', **leaves a dangerous loophole**. A separate report on Forestry will be published in June 2012, and then we will know how far woodland will be protected in situations where there is strong pressure for other developments.

See the website of the **Woodland Trust** for fuller information.

## RECENT BIRD NEWS

One of the more remarkable constants of the autumn and winter has been a **Crane**, first found at Lingham Lake on 16 June and then present at either Nosterfield NR or the various sites that make up the Nosterfield Quarry complex until at least late February.

The Nosterfield area has also played host to very large numbers of **Greylag Geese** throughout the autumn and early winter, common they may be but a spectacular sight in such numbers. What was truly remarkable was that they were joined from mid-November onwards by up to one hundred **European White-fronted Geese** and around forty **Tundra Bean Geese**, although numbers, particularly of the **Tundra Bean Geese** fell away quite quickly but sixty of the **European White-fronted Geese** were present in the area well into February. Such numbers are unprecedented in our area and were part of a national phenomenon with both species far more widespread and numerous than normal. Good numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** also joined these flocks of geese at times. It was certainly very instructive for those wishing to improve their goose identification skills. Up to six **Barnacle Geese**, a **Brent Goose** and six **Snow Geese**, the latter inevitably labelled "Of dubious origin" were also seen, whilst Nicholson's Lagoon and Hay-a-Park GP briefly hosted single **Greenland White-fronted Geese** during November. A **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** was at Gouthwaite Res amongst the **Canada Geese** on 11 March.

The only **Waxwing** flock reported was of 24 in Mallinson Oval on 28 December and **Bramblings** have been notable by their absence. Several Gardens have

hosted winter **Blackcaps** including my own, where two males were seen in early January, one of which was still present on 12 March.

The strong westerly winds the country has experienced this winter have brought large numbers of “white-winged gulls” especially **Iceland Gulls** to the whole of Western Europe and locally has been no exception. Most birds have been seen at either Allerton Park or the roost at Bar Lane Quarry, although at least five different **Iceland Gulls** have been seen in the Lingham Lake roost. Terry Box who has been the most regular watcher estimates that in February to early March he has seen at least ten different **Iceland Gulls**, three **Glaucous Gulls**, two **Yellow-legged Gulls** and a couple of **Kittiwakes**. There have also been singles of **Caspian** and **Kumlein’s Gull**, this latter is the Canadian subspecies of **Iceland Gull**. In addition an adult **Mediterranean Gull** is currently in the gull colony at Nosterfield NR and a pure white **Common Gull** was in the Lingham Lake roost on 10 March.

**Twite** are now much scarcer in our area than they once were but at least 20 were feeding amongst the water line detritus at Gouthwaite Res on 4 March. The first **Chiffchaffs** have been heard in the last few days (9-12 March), the herald of more spring migrants in the next few weeks. If you have as yet not sent your records in then can I urge some haste as it is not quite too late and I of course thank all of those who have already sent them in.

**Paul V Irving** Ornithological recorder

BTO NEWS

BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY

30,000 birdwatchers contributed to the recently completed Bird Atlas organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Birdwatch Ireland and The Scottish Ornithologists’ Club; at least 50% of those observers had not previously been involved in any of our projects. It has been an enormous success and the finished product will be published in 2014. Previous Atlases have looked at either breeding or wintering birds separately so the 2007-11 Atlas has been a truly mammoth undertaking. We are now keen to bring many of these contributors into the BTO family and I would like to take this opportunity to suggest that you might like to take a look at our ongoing projects: The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Garden BirdWatch (GBW), Nest Record Scheme (NRS), and Heronries Survey etc.

Ann Mettam mentioned Garden BirdWatch at a recent evening meeting: this is

a very worthwhile project which involves recording birds in your garden on a weekly basis, it is by no means demanding on your time and most observers set aside an hour or so during the course of one day in each recording week. Generally speaking observation at the feeding station is most productive but of course this tends to be more effective during the winter months unless of course you feed the birds year round. Your observations are then sent into the BTO either on special forms or via the dedicated web page. There is an administration fee of £15 per annum; sadly this does not give you membership of the Trust, that's another £30. Please take a look at the BTO website, from the home page go to Volunteers Surveys and then to Core Surveys, you will then find Garden BirdWatch. Long term contribution to GBW is very valuable as the data can be used in population trend studies and we do urge our observers to commit to as long a period of years as possible, week by week returns are also very important.

I'm organising a one day birdwatchers' conference to be held at Weetwood Hall Hotel, Leeds on 8th. September this year. There will be speakers from the North of England and the Trust. If the 2010 event was anything to go by this will be an equal success, space is limited to 180 and it's a bargain at £18 (including refreshments and buffet lunch). The final programme is not complete but we will be publicising it soon, application forms will be available from BTO HQ at Thetford, hope to see you there! Please contact me if you are interested in getting involved with "Citizen Science" or wish to know anything at all about the work of the BTO. Plenty of information is available on the website: [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

**Mike Brown** BTO Regional Representative for Yorkshire Central

## FARNHAM NEWS

During the first half of **September**, summer migrants were still moving through with Greenshanks, Green Sandpipers, Spotted Flycatchers and 30 Chiffchaffs being recorded. The first Peregrine Falcon of the autumn occurred on 10th. An exceptional sight on 18th was of 15 Common Buzzards in the air together, plus another four which were counted in different areas at the same time. An Osprey flew through on 23rd, the only record for the year, none having been seen as usual in the spring. A Wheatear was also present on the same day. A Sandwich Tern called as it approached on 25th, drawing the observer's attention away from a Peregrine which was feeding on prey on a nearby pylon, and the first Marsh Harrier of the year flew south on 30th.

On 3rd **October**, a female Common Scoter was present and seven Black-tailed Godwits flew through on 5th. Wigeons are normally 'fly-overs', but they began to appear on the lake as the month progressed. A Jack Snipe gave good views from 9th, on which date 23 Pintails flew over. Winter thrushes were moving through on 13th with 7,000 Fieldfares and 5,000 Redwings counted early evening. Twenty Pink-footed Geese flew over on 15th when 100 Wigeons were present. Raptors were evident with Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Common Buzzard and 11 Red Kites going in to roost during the third week. Three juvenile Pintails were present on 31st and Tree Sparrow numbers rose to 63.

**November** was extremely mild with mist and fog on some days. Duck numbers fluctuated with the following maxima: 48 Teal, 41 Gadwalls, 14 Goldeneyes, 100 Tufted Ducks, 81 Wigeons and 59 Mallards. The one that 'got away' was a brown swift seen briefly in foggy conditions on 20th, just at the time when Pallid Swifts were in the country. A redhead Smew was seen briefly on 28th before it departed and 45 Pink-footed Geese flew over; a Woodcock was flushed on 30th.

On 3rd **December**, a male Merlin flew over and 50 Redwings were present; a Peregrine Falcon was perched on its usual pylon on 6th. After very strong north-westerly winds with rain on 8th, a fine drake Scaup was found on the North Lake, though sailing activities there caused it to frequent the South Lake; it remained until 21st. A drake Pintail was present on 13th and the elusive Water Rail continued to give brief sightings. Coot numbers were extremely low, whereas in previous years 300 to 400 would be counted on the North Lake, the maximum count for this winter being 136. A juvenile White-fronted Goose, a rare visitor to Farnham, was in the back field on 17th. December was fairly mild with a temperature of 10°C on 25th and this was reflected in the lack of bird activity.

Overall 2011 was a very good year and we achieved our best annual total, recording 142 species (without counting Feral Pigeon!). The downside was that although seven pairs of Common Terns attempted to breed, they failed as eggs and young were all predated. Credit goes to the few regular observers who have produced such a comprehensive list for the site.

On 1st **January**, 15 Pintails flew over and five dropped in; 70 Siskins were recorded. The temperature was 7°C, heralding a very mild month. Five Whooper Swans were present on 3rd and Goldeneye numbers increased to 15 on 10th. A White-fronted Goose flew in with Greylags on 12th. Pink-footed Geese were moving west on 14th with three skeins totalling 380 and the

following day there were three skeins totalling 89; this movement was much earlier than in previous years. The Peregrine Falcon was again present on the pylon. A thin covering of ice on the lake on 18th concentrated the wildfowl with counts of 34 Wigeons, 37 Gadwalls, 48 Teal, 58 Mallards, 15 Pochards, 140 Tufted Ducks, 18 Goldeneyes and 172 Coots. Little bird movement was observed towards the end of the month; there was a temperature of 10°C on 25th, but two Jack Snipe were seen on 30th when the temperature fell below zero.

A Jack Snipe was found on 1st **February**, after which date temperatures dropped and two days later most of the lake had frozen over; the daytime temperature was minus 5°C. Wildfowl were concentrated in a small area of open water and three Common Shelducks, 23 Wigeons, 24 Gadwalls, 30 Tufted Ducks, 27 Teal and six Goldeneyes were present. Snow cover on the frozen lake made for interesting observations: tracks showed evidence of fox activity as it searched around for possible prey. A lucky find on 5th was a Bar-tailed Godwit, a rare visitor to the site, one minute later and it would have been missed as it dropped onto the frozen lake as the observers walked by; it was still present in the afternoon. Several Common Snipe feeding in the snow outside the hide were a gift for the photographer. A Water Rail continued to be seen, but it gave only fleeting views. It was very busy at the feeding station, where Tree Sparrows were too numerous to count. A pair of Tawny Owls was found roosting at the south end. As the temperatures rose, a pair of Sparrowhawks was displaying and returning Oystercatchers were in evidence. On 19th, 42 Pink-footed Geese flew over and, in heavy rain on 22nd, 27 Common Snipe were feeding on the islands.

On 3rd **March**, 30 Whooper Swans flew over west and this coincided with a general movement through Yorkshire. The warm, sunny weekend of 11th brought our first butterflies of the year when Commas, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells emerged from hibernation.

Our winter management of the site since October is almost complete, thanks are due to the continued commitment of the few members who give their time so that the habitat may be maintained for the breeding warblers, flowering plants, butterflies and other life forms on the site. The pond needs an annual check to ensure the habitat is maintained for the great crested newts, which continue to flourish along with dragonflies and other invertebrates. Ken Limb continues to collate all our bird records and to produce a report for the site, for which we are very grateful.

**June E Atkinson**

Chair, Management Committee, Honorary Warden

## A PLEA FOR RECORDS OF THE FLEA-BEETLES

### *Aphthona pallida* & *Aphthona nigriceps*.

These two species have recently been “split” from what was until now considered to be a single species in Britain, the RDB2 *Aphthona nigriceps*. In 2009, a pair of Scottish workers discovered that “*nigriceps*” species encountered by them were in fact another species altogether, the similar *A. pallida*. This prompted me to look at specimens in North Yorkshire and confirm that all those I found, in the Helmsley and Grassington areas and also on the HDNS recording area were also *pallida*. (The two species can only be separated by examining the male genitalia). I contacted Bob Marsh, the YNU County Recorder and he confirmed that all the specimens he could find from other parts of Yorkshire are also *pallida*. However there are very few actual specimens to match up with extensive Yorkshire records which shows the importance of keeping voucher specimens of any new location records of insects, even of common species.

It is probable that *nigriceps* does not occur at all in Yorkshire ( it is considered by Warchalowski, the European expert on the group, to be strictly a southern European species) but, to be absolutely sure I need to examine as many specimens as possible. It would be a great help if interested HDNS members could examine any clumps of Meadow Cranesbill, the food plant, they see this year for the presence of *Aphthona* and to send me about 6 specimens if they find any (to ensure that at least one is a male). Please do not send flea-beetles from any other plant. There are *many* other such species! Specimens can easily be found by shaking the lower leaves of the plant into a container, such as a lunch box, when they will be immediately seen as *small* ( 1.8 - 2.0mm) beetles which will, as their name implies, quickly hop out of the container again if not immediately transferred to a tube or similar small container.

The only other common beetle likely to be encountered on Cranesbill is the black weevil *Zaclarus geranii* which is often seen in the flowers and is longer (2-3mm) than *Aphodius* (which is restricted to the foliage).

**Jim Jobe**



## RARE PLANT RECORD

### **Yellow Bird's-nest (*Hypopitys monotropa*) in the Nidd Gorge**

Yellow Bird's-nest *Hypopitys monotropa* is a nationally rare plant that occurs sporadically in wooded habitats where it parasitizes tree roots, with the aid of fungi from the genus *Tricholoma*. It therefore uses the fungi to extract all the nutrients it needs. In Yorkshire it has always been a very rare plant and in recent years has only been recorded in three sites: Flax Dale in Dalby Forest (VC62), Stanley Ferry Flash near to Wakefield (VC63) and Cromwell Bottom near to Elland in Leeds (VC63).

It was therefore very good news to here that Mark Whorley found a few plants growing in the Nidd Gorge last year. On the 24 July Mark spotted three small plants emerging from a bare track edge under a mixed canopy of hawthorn, willow and ash. Initially Mark thought they might be a strange form of Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, which is not uncommon in the Gorge, but on checking he realized it was in fact Yellow Bird's-nest. On the 7 August Mark found a further 3 plants growing very close by and by the time I visited the site on 9 September one had turned brown but all had well formed capsules containing seed.

Both flowers and capsules were glabrous confirming it as the rarer of the two subspecies in the British Isles (subsp. *hypophegea* det. Fred Rumsey, Natural History Museum). The browned-off stems remained visible up till mid-December and in September I noted some *Tricholoma*-like fungi growing within a metre of the plants, although further work is needed to confirm their identity (I'd be very happy to show the site to any local mycologists who are interested). Ecologically the site is quite different from the other Yorkshire sites which are largely artificial (conifer plantations, willow carr on former mineral workings). The woodland itself is certainly secondary but retains a 'natural' flavour with lots of Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and the scarce Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* close by. Mark should be congratulated on this excellent discovery which is the first record for Mid-west Yorkshire (VC64) for over 100 years.

**Kevin Walker**

Botanical Society of the British Isles

## MOTHS

To summarise another busy and very fruitful year for the moth trappers and recorders: starting with the “micro” moths, new species continue to be recorded for the Society’s area – in 2011 this amounted to 15 species, including *Etiella zinckenella*, also new for Yorkshire! Close behind were six species only recorded for the second time and yet another three which haven’t been seen in the area since the mid 1970s.

Onto the “macro” moths, just one, the beautiful, lichen-imitating Varied Coronet was newly recorded. Members may remember all the newspaper articles about rare migrant moths in the south of England last autumn – very few reached the Society’s area but two records of the scarce Small Mottled Willow and single Golden Twin-spot and Vestal were some compensation. There was an influx during July of the more familiar day-flying migrant, the Hummingbird Hawk-moth and to your recorders’ delight, finally the fourth Pine Hawk-moth (a species expanding its range in the county) was trapped near Harrogate (only previous records in 2005).

Of the declining species which are being monitored nationally, there were only six records of the V-moth in the whole county, four of which were trapped in our area! Similarly, Spinach, Blue-bordered Carpet, Lunar Thorn and Tawny Pinion are now considered extremely rare in Yorkshire but were all recorded in our area during 2011.

For those species increasing their range in the Society’s area, the Grey Shoulder-knot continues to impress with numbers recorded and more recent arrivals such as Vine’s Rustic, Blackneck, Obscure Wainscot and Bird’s Wing continue to spread north and westwards. Second records of Brown Scallop and Beautiful Hook-tip and third records of Marsh Pug, Saltern Ear and Brown-veined Wainscot possibly demonstrate that species can be present in low numbers but rarely trapped. Lastly, wanderers from more remote habitats, such as the higher ground, can occur, for example the ninth record of Red Carpet for the HDNS.

Full details of all species recorded last year, with more detailed information on the rare or rarely recorded ones, will be presented in the Annual Report and we hope that members will be able to attend some moth trapping events during the summer. Dates have already been booked for Ellington Banks, Hackfall Woods and Nosterfield LNR – please contact us for further details.

**Jill Warwick and Charlie Fletcher**