

Darlington & Teesdale Naturalists' Field Club

**Founded 1891**

**Registered Charity No: 510783**

**Website:- [www.dtnfc.org](http://www.dtnfc.org)**

## **Annual Subscription**

Ordinary member £10.00

Full time student £1.00

Cover photograph courtesy of John Turner  
Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

## **Officers and Council 2020**

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| President            | Fleur Miles     |
| President Elect      | Steve Gater     |
| General Secretary    | Sue Weston      |
| Membership Secretary | Brian Wood      |
| Treasurer            | Martin Chisholm |
| Summer Programme     | Derek Risbey    |
| Winter Programme     | John Turner     |
| Editor               | Lynne Heslop    |

## **Section Organisers**

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Archaeology    | Steve Keeney      |
| Botany         | David Selby       |
| Geology        | Elizabeth Elliott |
| Lepidoptera    | Brian Wood        |
| Mammals        | Ian Bond          |
| Marine Biology | Carole Sobkowiak  |
| Mycology       | Jill Cunningham   |
| Ornithology    | John Turner       |
| Projects       | Carole Sobkowiak  |

## **Other Members of Council**

Mary Atkinson, Margaret Rowland, Falgunee Sarker

## **Other Organisations**

AES  
British Pteridological Society  
BSBI  
Durham Wildlife Trust  
Ramblers  
YNU  
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

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## Section Organiser Reports

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## Special Reports and Walk Reports

## **President's Report - Fleur Miles**

I took over as President from my predecessor, Falgunee Sarker, on Monday 29 March 2021, in the Club's 130th year. The AGM was held via Zoom so I had to present myself with the gavel, sound block and whistle! Typical, on a special occasion such as this, my computer decided to go on the go-slow so everything was occurring 30 seconds later on my Zoom and people's voices sounded very gravelly! Not a great start!

2021 was the second year of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In 2020, we had planned a Summer Programme but had been unable to run it due to travel and group meeting restrictions imposed on everyone to protect the NHS from the Pandemic. However, in 2021 the situation had improved so we were able to run the planned Summer Programme of 28 Field Trips. We visited Allenheads in the north, Bempton Cliffs on the east coast in the south, Cautley Spout in the west and Greenabella Marsh on the east coast.

It was lovely to be able to visit Bempton Cliffs again to see the gliding gannets and the handful of puffins sitting on the cliff ledges. Some of us attended the Yorkshire Naturalist Union events held at Duncombe Park and Cautley Spout, enjoying cups of tea and cake in local hostelryes nearby to report back on our findings after a full day's naturalising.

We did find some spectacular natural history highlights closer to home. At Greenabella Marsh we discovered some mud shrimps in the shallow, brackish ponds. These shrimps are a common food source for wading birds but it is not a species we regularly encounter on our coastal trips. In the bird world at Teesmouth, Greatham Creek to be precise, the best highlight had to be the Spoonbill which appeared together with Little Egrets and our native Grey Heron.

Finally, after an absence of two years since 9 March 2020, we were able at long last, to hold winter lectures in person at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College. Thank you to Jill Cunningham and Falgunee Sarker for the talks they gave on 12 January 2022 and to the 23 Members who attended.

I would like to thank Sue Weston, General Secretary, who has played a major part in communications during the Pandemic forwarding e-mails and newsletters to Club Members, running Zoom meetings for lectures and Council Meetings and organising the Christmas Dinner at The Mowden. I would like to thank all the Council Members and all Club Members for your continued support of the Club be that by attending lectures by Zoom, in person at the College or attending the Summer Programme outings or indeed, leading the outings during these difficult Pandemic times. My best wishes to the Club and to the new President in 2022.

## General Secretary - Sue Weston

The year started with further Covid19 restrictions and the club was unable to have indoor meetings, however we continued to use Zoom for online meetings each month. The January meeting was on the Allendale Valleys and they continued into May when we had the first outing to High Force on the Summer Programme which was well attended.

The Club Council meetings continued via Zoom for the year with the first held at the end of January. We welcomed Ian Bond to the Council as the new Mammal Leader and Steve Gater agreed to take on the role of President Elect. Fleur Miles became the new President and Brian Wood took on the Membership role.

Margaret Port had her 90th birthday early in the year and the club was very sad to lose a knowledgeable and well - respected member when Don Griss passed away. He was a very active Mammal leader and had unfortunately been ill during the pandemic. Don had been an incredible member of the club for many years.



Barry and Sue Chapman returned to the UK after being delayed for many months in Australia during the pandemic and it was good to see them on some Summer outings.

Well done to Jill and Fal for a task which was undertaken on behalf of DTNFC by them in June. Hundreds of churches across the England and Wales took part in a week-long nature count this summer from 5th June to 13th June. The idea was to gather information on wildlife in churchyards. People were encouraged to visit churchyards and record the nature they found.

Following the Summer programme outings, Winter meetings were resumed in October. For the first time since the pandemic a number of members celebrated Christmas with a meal at the Mowden Pub in December. 2021 had been a strange year being able to meet at times and sometimes not. We lost valuable members and gained new ones. We persevered with online meetings when face to face would have been much better. New projects and new contacts were made and whilst we couldn't always meet in person, the club and most of its members have survived a time of incredible challenge that has shook not just Darlington or the UK but the whole world.

## **Membership Secretary - Brian Wood**

I took over the membership post temporarily to allow Fleur to concentrate on her presidential duties.

The last year has been a bit trying to say the least, with no regular indoor meetings happening until this month (Jan 2022), the club had to organise other means for members to keep in touch. Fortunately Secretary Sue Weston and Winter Programme organiser John Turner set up Zoom meetings with very interesting speakers and these were very well received by those folk able to connect.

Fortunately the summer programme went ahead, albeit with some early restrictions and were generally well attended.

I am pleased to report that at this time 55 people have renewed their membership and with 5 Honorary members and one life member we have a total of 61 members. Also pleasing is that included in those numbers we have several new members to whom I extend a warm welcome to the Field Club.

The bank transfer system was again well used for renewals.

I wish to thank Fleur Miles and Martin Chisholm for their assistance.

## **Treasurer - Martin Chisholm**

The accounts are prepared on the receipts and payments method and are for the financial year ending 31 December 2021. Overall, there was a loss of nearly £400 compared to the £112 surplus in 2020.

Compared to 2020, income was reduced due to the lack of meetings, no tax refund and subsidy of the field trip.

Expenditure was contained at that necessary for the club to maintain function. Room rental covers the cost of Zoom subscriptions to allow the meeting programme and Council meetings to proceed. The club ran no Sponsorship activities during the year thus no exceptional items.

The Operational Income and Expenditure for 2022, as 2021, is difficult to forecast. Income from entrance donations will depend on how many face to face meetings occur in the remainder of the 2021/2 winter programme and



## **Summer Programme - Derek Risbey**

This year was helped by the fact that we had arranged the programme for 2020 that could not take place due to lockdown and travel restrictions. So a lot of the arrangements were moved forward to 2021 and this helped a lot. The whole of the summer program in 2021 turned out to be very good indeed with all walk leaders doing a first class job showing great care and enthusiasm. Well done all walk leaders.

This year we introduced a new Health and Safety Safeguarding policy. Walk leaders filled out a simple form, for risk assessment and attendance, which kept us all safe and maintained our legal requirements.

Despite covid difficulties that restricted us carrying passengers in cars we had some super outings, Like our trip to Allenheads, Bempton Cliffs, (which was a coach trip,) or Cautley Spout and lots of other outings much closer to home.

Two of our outings we joined in with the YNU program and they were both successful. This is something we will look to repeat if possible. A big thank you to all walk leaders and those who attended.

### **May 2021**

18th        Brinkburn Nature Reserve - Sue Weston  
22nd        High Force - David Selby  
25th        Broken Scar - Mary Atkinson

### **June**

1st         Skerningham - Lynne Heslop  
8th         Richmond - Christine Lunn  
13th        Duncombe Park - Elizabeth Elliott  
15th        Blackwell Parkland - Carole Sobkowiak  
20th        Allenheads - Lizzie Maddison  
22nd        High Coniscliffe - Brian Wood  
29th        Goosepool - Jill Cunningham

### **July**

4th         Tunstall Reservoir - Sue Weston  
11th        Wolsingham Family Walk - Steve Keeney  
13th        Low Coniscliffe - Brian Wood  
17th        Reeth - Brian Wood  
20th        Snipe Pond - Elizabeth Elliott  
24th        Greenabella Marsh - Ian Bond  
26th        Bempton Cliffs - John Turner  
31st        South Gare - Sue Weston

### **August**

14th        Cautley Spout - Derek Risbey

### **September**

5th         Binchester Roman Fort - Steve Keeney

7th Whorlton Village Walk and Indoor Meeting - Derek Risbey  
11th Houghall - Jill Cunningham  
14th South Park Bat Watch - Ian Bond (cancelled due to bad weather)  
18th Low Barns - Fleur Miles  
21st The Winnies - Falgunnee Sarker  
25th Teesmouth - John Turner

### **October**

2nd Fungus Foray - Jill Cunningham

### **Winter Programme - John Turner**

Because of covid restrictions preventing large indoor meetings it was decided to hold a monthly Zoom meeting with a speaker. The idea was tried out with one of our members, Martin Chisholm, giving a talk in 2020 on Moths caught in his garden moth trap. This was a success so we continued to hold Zoom meetings with invited speakers in 2021.

January 11th: Lizzie Maddison – A Walk around the Allen Valleys  
February 8th: Steve Gater – An introduction to the booklet ‘The Natural History of Wear Dale’  
March 29th: AGM followed by Sue Bradley – The French Alps in Spring  
April 12th: Patrick Oulton – The Tees/Swale Project  
May 17th: Vivien Kent- The BTO Garden Bird Watch Project  
October 12th: Dave Barlow – The Flowers and Industrial History of South Gare  
November 16th: Mark Slaughter – Water Voles  
December 15th: Club Christmas Dinner

### **Editor - Lynne Heslop**

Thank you to all the Council Members for submitting their reports under these difficult circumstances and to the walk leaders for their reports also. Due to a depletion in the club’s finances because of the pandemic, members were asked if they would be happy to receive the Annual Report as an electronic copy and the majority that responded indicated that they would. A number of hard copies will be printed to give to associated organisations and for any members who are unable to access the electronic version. The Annual Report will therefore be available on the club’s website.

# Section Organisers' Reports

## Archeology - Steve Keeney

After the frustrations and restrictions of the Covid pandemic on our Clubs activities it was so good to enjoy a Summer Programme of outings again. As I write we have just held our first indoor meeting as well. As usual I would like to take this opportunity to thank All Council Members for the hard work they do in supporting the Club and its activities. Although we could not meet in person, the programme of Zoom presentations was for me a great consolation. I would like to thank all the walk leaders for allowing us to discover, enjoy and record natural history in landscapes in our area that are also rich with local history.

It would seem Archaeology on television is as popular as ever. I hope you had the chance to see The Digging for Britain programme presented by Alice Roberts which has featured many archaeological projects including community excavations at Richmond Castle. In the Summer I led an outing to see the new excavations at Binchester Roman Fort and also at Auckland Castle and to look at the gothic revival Deer House built in 1760 to provide the Bishop of Durham's deer with shelter and food.

We are experiencing a revolutionary period of advancing scientific and forensic improvements which are greatly increasing our ability to identify archaeological sites and what may be hidden under the ground without excavation.

As part of the Brightwater project they sponsored a unique archaeological project and I was pleased to be selected as one of 100 volunteers to use Lidar to identify possible archaeological sites within the project area. The Historic Environment Records(HER) and historic maps were inspected to see if sites had previously been recorded. 3500 potential new sites have been identified to help update the HER records to aid and inform the Planning process. The volunteers ability to recognise and record sites is being used to try and teach an artificial intelligence computer to be able to search and identify sites from Lidar images. The project was led by a team from "Dig Ventures" who are a very experienced team of archaeologists who carry out many community archaeological projects and their web page is well worth a look.

I also recommend the wonderful "www.keys to the past" website which is a fantastic source of information on the archaeological records of Durham and Darlington. The Tees Archaeology website who maintain the Historic Environment Records for Hartlepool and Stockton is another good source of information. "Altogether Archaeology" is a community group which undertakes projects in the North Pennines between the A66 and A69 roads and is also worth checking out online.

## Botany - David Selby

This report often starts with the words, "We have had another good year." This year despite planning a full programme throughout both the winter and summer, many of our events had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19. There was a 'window' in Spring and early Summer however, when we were out, a good time for botanists.

Nine members took part in the New Year Plant Hunt 2021 and overall identified 64 species.

The Narrow-leaved Ragwort *Senecio inaequidens* was the most interesting plant, originally from Southern Africa. Here it grows alongside major roads and railway tracks where it was indeed found. The transport of wool through Darlington along the railway, was probably a significant vector in its dispersal.

In March, Fal Sarkar and Derek Risbey undertook a survey of the Yellow Star of Bethlehem *Gagea lutea*, along the banks of the Tees and counted over 800 plants including at new sites in Spoil Bank Wood. It is a delight to see this beautiful flower so abundantly in our area and it earned an article in The Times of 15th January 2022.

There were successful visits to Allenheads, Blackwell Parkland, Broken Scar, Round Howe at Richmond, Goosepool near Middleton St. George, Snipe Pond, South Gare, and the Tees Valley near High Force to name but a few.

Spoil Bank Wood revealed all four meadow grasses, Annual Meadow-Grass *Poa annua*, Wood Meadow-Grass *Poa nemoralis*, Rough Meadow-Grass *Poa trivialis* and Smooth Meadow-Grass *Poa pratensis* along with some interesting woodland ferns. We recorded Hard shield fern *Polystichum aculeatum*, Hart's tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and Broad buckler fern *Dryopteris dilatata*.

Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* was a good finding in Snipe Pond. Here Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea* was also recorded. This plant had appeared in the club's records some 70 years ago.

Two very successful visits also took place with the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU). The first in June was to Duncombe Park in the Rye valley where 66 species were recorded. On the second, to Cautley Spout, the club members recorded many interesting plants including Trailing St John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum* and Creeping Spearwort *Ranunculus reptans*. We have few carnivorous plants in this country, but we found Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. These plants are found in acid bog habitats

and to supplement their nutritional requirements they have evolved as a carnivorous plant.

South Gare has many different habitats each with unique geology so we had an enriched plant record. In the sandy habitat we recorded Annual Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* and Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris*, plants found here by club member J.E.Mowers in the 1920's. These records show the importance of keeping plant records. Prickly Saltwort *Salsola kali* and Shrubby Sea-blite *Suaeda vera* were also notable finds but many plants have disappeared from these habitats.

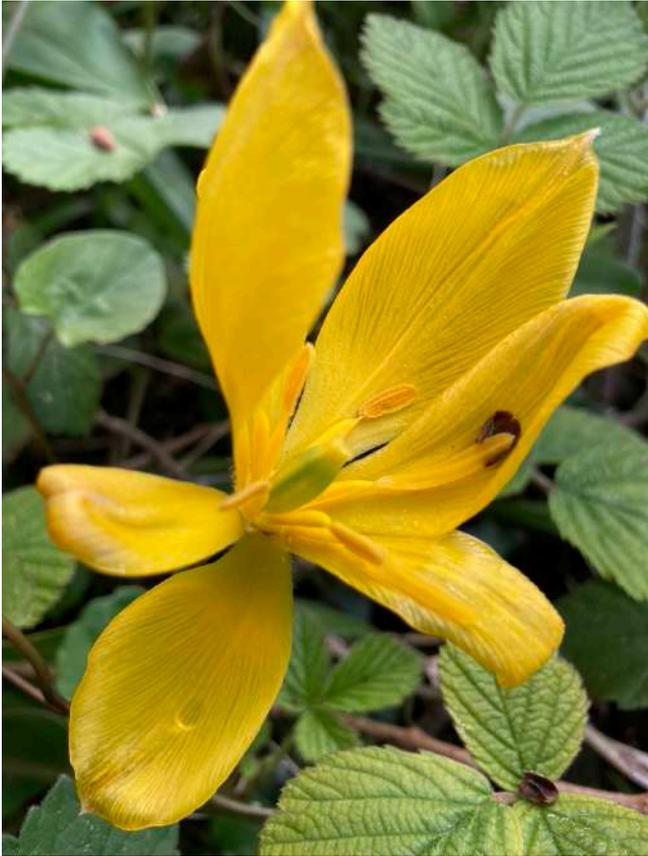
Orache is a plant that can only be positively identified when in flower. Our timing was right and Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis* that was found. Frosted Orache *Atriplex laciniata* and Duke of Argyll's Tea-tree *Lycium barbarum* were also notable findings.



Birds Eye Primrose *Primula farinosa*

Amongst the special geology around High Force in Upper Teesdale many plants recorded are relics of the ice age. Shrubby Cinquefoil *Potentilla fruticosa* has been seen. This was one of only two sites for this species found in England. There were many Tea-leaved Willow *Salix phylicifolia* recorded by the river bank. In a stone-crack of the Holwick Head Bridge Brittle bladder fern *Cystopteris fragilis* and Maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium viride* were growing and Mountain Everlasting was recorded in the bare rock very close to the river.

Mountain Everlasting *Antennaria dioica* was recorded by the club member H.T.Hodgkin in 1890. In the damp area Bird's-eye Primrose *Primula farinosa* a continental northern high-altitude species was recorded.



Wild Tulip, *Tulipa sylvestris*.

This part of the river Tees from Wynch Bridge to High Force is very beautiful and contains many rare plant species but in recent years these plants are being destroyed by kayakers and other sporting activities. In some areas plants are regularly trampled by careless visitors and jumping activity from the Wynch Bridge has damaged plants so much that Bakers Hawkweed *Hieracium bakerianum* is now extinct, a plant that was recorded by J.E.Mowers in August 1905! Protection by law enforcement could protect these plants for future generations.

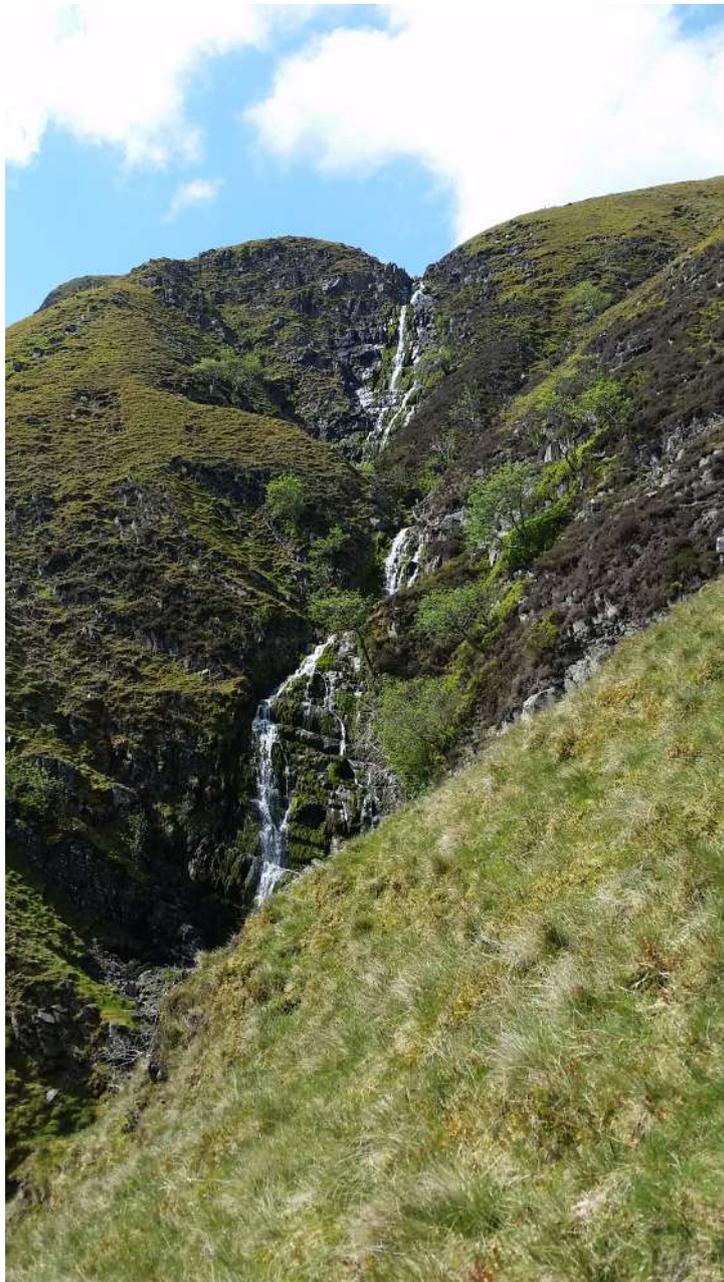
In April, Fal recorded a successful search for the rare wild tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*). Three specimens were found in a small area not far from the Tees along with 45 Fritillaries.

As I write it has just been announced that most Covid 19 restrictions will be lifted shortly. We can only hope that we will be able to complete our programme without cancellations in 2022.

Thank you very much to Fal who compiled the detailed botanical section of this report and to Derek Risbey for the photograph of the Bird's Eye Primrose.

## Geology - Elizabeth Elliot

The summer programme took place and as usual we looked at the geological sites that we visited. The limestone areas have more alkaline pH in the soil and bogs have a more acid pH. Some members attended the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU) trip to Cautley Spout and Cautley Home Beck. It is a remote spot in the Howgills on the border between North Yorkshire and Cumbria. The Spout falls over a limestone cliff and in the valley below the beck flows through some acidic boggy areas. The sides of the valley have limestone grassland. These factors lead to a wide variety of flora which support insects, birds and other wildlife in abundance.



## Lepidoptera - Brian Wood

Thank you to those members who sent me their reports of butterfly and moth sightings, unfortunately it is still the case that although reports are increasing numbers of butterflies are not. After a promising start the spring turned cold and wet which meant that early broods were adversely affected resulting in fewer butterflies on the wing. Later breeders did better.

First report I received was from John Baker with a Peacock seen 26th Feb, this butterfly hibernates so would likely have been roused by a bit of warm sun.

Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock were the most commonly reported, with only a couple of reports of Painted Lady.

Steve and Sylvia Keeney saw Marbled White also Small Copper Ringlet and Meadow Brown at Wingate Quarry in mid July.



Snipe Pond in August saw Large and Small Whites, Green Veined White, Ringlet and Red Admiral.

On 7th October I had a Comma on my allotment with many many Large and Small Whites in the vicinity.

Climate warming is affecting many butterflies with species moving north but species that prefer a cooler habitat are finding that the weather can become too hot and they have to move to areas more suitable even if it is only to the opposite side of a valley. Unfortunately habitat loss pesticides and pollution are also causing butterflies major problems.

Although it is very unlikely to spot a butterfly in the winter there are species of moth that may be on the wing, the most common being the Winter Moth which can withstand freezing temperatures, only the male moth flies. Blue and Great Tits feed on the Winter Moth Caterpillars and will time their breeding to coincide with the moths lifecycle.

## **Mammals and Herptiles - Ian Bond**

This is my first report as mammal section leader, a mantle that was worn with great distinction by Don Griss for many years. Don was the person who I looked up to when I first got into local natural history several decades ago and later we would spend many hours swapping mammal stories on the drives to and from Northumbria Mammal Group meetings, where he and I served on the committee for almost all of the group's existence. He knew so much about mammals that it was humbling to find out that his main passion was actually fish. I'm not planning to add fish to the role anytime soon but I have broadened it to include reptiles and amphibians, which are another interest of mine.

While mammals are warm-blooded, nevertheless their populations are affected by weather and the cold spring, with frosts into May, seems to have depressed bat populations this year. Certainly my annual count of Daubenton's bats on the River Skerne through South Park produced the lowest number of bat passes of any year that I have surveyed it. The numbers of bats on the lake in South Park also appeared to be substantially lower than usual, on the two nights that I visited.

South Park is one of the best, perhaps the best, bat viewing locations that I know, so it was a shame that the Field Club bat walk there had to be cancelled, but hopefully we can do it in 2022 instead. But South Park is also home to a species that is much less frequently seen, at least by me. I saw my first House Mice for around 20 years there, in the aviaries in 2020 and was pleased to see that they were still there for me to be able to add them to my year list in 2021. I'm sure I wouldn't take such a relaxed attitude if they were the pests that they once were but rarity ups everything's value. Even rarer was the report of a Terrapin on the Skerne in South Park. Terrapins are unlikely to breed in Britain until such time as we manage to melt the ice caps, so they will remain a fairly harmless novelty for a while yet. I saw two Terrapins, of different but closely related species, Red-eared and Yellow-bellied, in Brinkburn Pond in April. They are vegetarians when they are adult; I hope they like duckweed as you couldn't see the water for it.

The Field Club's visit to Brinkburn Pond this year found newts in the ponds in the adjacent Horse Field, some of which were Great Crested. Unfortunately those ponds tend to dry up in the summer but this year one of the ponds appeared to hold enough water to allow some of the larvae to develop into efts. A more surprising newt find was of what appeared to be an Alpine Newt in a pond in the north of Darlington.

Newly arrived in the role, I made a request for people to let me have their mammal and herp sightings and many thanks to those of you who did. Mary Atkinson told me that she had seen a vole in the Denes. Wondering if it could have been a Water Vole, which otherwise seem to be extinct in the

borough of Darlington, I scoured the banksides from Westbrook to Cockerton but found no signs, so I can only think it must have been a Field Vole, which can get quite large. Her report of a Rabbit in Wolsingham didn't require any further investigations.

Rabbits are becoming much rarer though, due to a new version of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease. Fortunately (for rabbits at least, though perhaps not for farmers) they still seem to be very abundant in various parts of Teesdale. That doesn't seem to be the case in Swaledale. On the walk from Reeth to Healaugh there were lots of dead rabbits and walking back along the river, where the ground was peppered with rabbit holes, there was a pervading smell of rotting flesh, which was presumably due to rabbits dying underground. In some parts of the country, numbers have dropped by 90%, which is approaching levels caused by the outbreak of Myxomatosis in the 1950s. Records of rabbits are therefore much more significant these days. A species that has had conservationists concerned for some time, but for different reasons, is the Hedgehog. In the case of Hedgehogs it is changes in land use and road traffic mortality that seem to be the key factors in its decline. I was pleased to see that I still had Hedgehogs regularly visiting my garden in the Harrowgate Hill area of Darlington throughout this year, but due to Covid I wasn't commuting to work so couldn't continue my annual monitoring of Hedgehog road casualties. However if anyone would like to read the findings for previous years it can be viewed at: <https://ravenonthewing.com/2021/04/02/where-didnt-the-hedgehog-cross-the-road/>

The local extinction of Water Voles is down to another factor again, which is predation by American Mink. Although not seen very often, Mink are still very much with us. Martin Uitenbosch got a photo of one in his garden on a trail camera and a video was taken of one that was climbing a tree by the River Skerne at Rockwell. I also found a Mink track on the bank of Summerhouse Beck back in April. It was the first time that I had explored Summerhouse Beck and my first impression was that it looked like Water Vole heaven but then heaven is about more than the scenery. On a happier mustelid note, I found Otter spraint on a boulder in the Skerne a few metres downstream of Albert Road; which is a very built-up area in the middle of the town. This is where I played as a child back in the 1960s, when the prospects for Otters were about as good as they were for Pandas. At least some things get better.

## Marine Biology - Carole Sobkowiak

There were no Club visits to the coast this year.

Thousands of dead crabs and lobsters were washed up on North East shores in the Autumn of 2021. The Environment Agency has ruled out sewage pollution and has said that they were not killed by chemical pollution. They have screened 1,000 potential chemical contaminants but found no evidence that could lead to an event of this scale.

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science said “We are continuing to investigate whether animal disease has caused this mortality”.

It is strange that this event is just affecting crabs and lobsters.



300 million tons of plastic are produced every year and 14 million tons end up in our oceans. This accounts for 80% of marine debris that breaks down into microplastics which contribute to climate change threatening our marine species.



## Mycology - Jill Cunningham

Another year of variable Covid restrictions that led to few club walks. However, I gained a good understanding of the fungi to be found in the local area from personal walks and from those emailed by members.

Mary Atkinson spotted clumps of striking Golden Scalycaps, *pholiota aurivella*, in the Denes and Tom Fowke sent in photos of Clouded Funnels, *clitocybe nebularis*, and Common Funnels, *clitocybe gibba*, from Trinity Church. Others included Velvet Shank, Oyster Fungus, Field Mushroom, Dung Roundhead, Velvet Shield, *pluteus umbrosus*, and Fal spotted the orange warts of *synchytrium taraxaci* on Dandelion leaves.

It is great to have Gordon Simpson back in the NE and, true to form, within a month he had found a cluster of very rare brown ear-cup fungi, *otidea tuomikoskii*, in Hamsterley Forest. This was a 1st record for the NE and with only 4 records in the whole of the UK!

I managed to visit Toy Top on the A68 a few times before the main foray and was surprised at the number of species growing in such a small woodland. The highlight being the many Aniseed Funnels, *clitocybe odora*, in their blue-porcelain perfection and distinctive aniseed aroma along with Rooting Shanks, *xerula radicata*, with their wrinkled caps balanced on foot high stems

Of the larger fungi, 60 huge plate sized Dryad's Saddles, *polyporus squamosus*, found on one fallen trunk were an eye opener at Whitecliffe Woods, Richmond. Majestic Mottled Boletes, *leccinum variicolor*, under Aspen at Drinkfield Marsh; stalked black Gorse Crampballs, *daldinia fissa*, on burnt Gorse and bunched clumps of Upright Coral, *ramaria stricta*, both east from Broken Scar were some of the more unusual finds.

Micro-fungi continue to intrigue me and I now frequently find *phragmidium bulbosum*, the 3rd rust on bramble. *Vankya ornithogalii* smut bursting out of leaf slits on Yellow Star of Bethlehem along the Tees banks and a 6m patch of Moschatel plants covered in the tiny white cup rust of *puccinia albescens* near Stapleton were notable finds. Later in the year 'black dot' and 'leaf spot' fungi on old leaves can be identified by microscopy and host plant - *pyrenopeziza petiolaris* and *gnomonium cerastis* on fallen Sycamore petioles, *stemphylium sarciniforme* and *cymadothea trifolii* on Clover are just a few of those now frequently noted this year along with the less common *leptotrochila verrucosa* on Sweet Woodruff collected from Gainford Spa. Just a few of the fungal species recorded this year.



Aniseed Funnel



Golden Scalycap



Mottled Bolete

## Ornithology - John Turner

Birding was again affected by the varying anti-covid rules and many birders tended to concentrate on their home patch. The first quarter of the year saw a continuation of the cold, wet and sometimes snowy weather that delayed the start of breeding by resident birds. The cold northerly winds also delayed the arrival of many summer visitors such as Swifts, House Martins and Sand Martins.

Our plants and animals are all descended from ancestors that have survived similar and worse weather catastrophes which remove weaklings from the gene pool to leave it stronger to meet the next dangers. However the world's wildlife population is now meeting the start of two unique dangers that did not challenge their ancestors and this includes humans. Namely rapid global climate change and modern intensive farming practices.

The desynchronisation of the seasons through climate change is affecting the food supply of animals that have to match their needs to their prey species or their food plants. Intensive farming is using more and more powerful pesticides, clearing the countryside of insects and the wild plants that provide seeds to feed nestlings and adult birds and mammals through the winter. Those of us who have been recording wildlife for the last 20 or so years have noticed the disappearance of species from formally well populated habitats. I have seen these changes around Barton during the 22 years we have lived here. Stubble fields that used to have Yellowhammer flocks of 50 now have none and we do not see any singing Yellowhammers in the breeding season. The massive Starling murmurations over the village have reduced from thousands to below one hundred, House Martins and Swifts no longer nest in the village and House Sparrow groups have more than halved or completely disappeared. Skylarks still sing in early spring but are not heard after the spraying equipment is seen in the fields, both arable and grassland. There is also concern about the populations of sea birds along our coast, especially those that feed on fish that swim near the surface, such as Puffins and Kittiwakes. See my report of the Bempton Cliffs outing.

It's not all bad news as common garden bird species are holding up in Darlington's gardens and green spaces and some species such as Treecreeper and Goldcrest are doing well in the urban habitat. Little Egrets have been reported from the Denes and along the Tees and we even have one as a regular presence at the Barton ford. A Ring-necked Parakeet has been reported from the Blackwell Meadow and one other site in Darlington. We are also seeing Blackcaps throughout the winter in gardens backing on to Blackwell Meadow and in Barton. This is part of a trend for Blackcaps from Holland and Germany to migrate to England instead of going south to the Mediterranean. The individuals that do this have been shown to have shorter wings and stronger bills to feed on seeds put out in garden feeders

demonstrating an ability for rapid evolution. It is thought that the shorter migration route saves energy and allows the birds to return early to their breeding grounds and claim the best nest sites, giving them a breeding advantage.

Climate change is also thought to be the cause of bird species (and insects) colonising the UK and specifically England. These species are those that have already moved north from Southern Europe, such as Glossy Ibis, Purple Heron, Spoonbill, Great White Egret, Western Cattle Egret and Bee-eaters which all have established nesting sites in Southern England in the last 10 years. All of these species, except Purple Heron, have been recorded in our area. Spoonbill and Cattle Egret are breeding regularly at RSPB Fairburn Ings, near Castleford. There is no reason why they should not breed in the reed beds around Teesmouth. Non-breeding individuals have all been recorded for several years at Salholme. Bee-eaters have already nested successfully in Co. Durham and Cumbria.

So there is hope after all. We may not be able to stop climate change in the next 50 years or so and will lose some of our favourite species to be replaced by newcomers from the south. We are looking at exciting times for ornithologists in future years.



Little Egret and Lapwing at Low Barns

Spoonbill on new salt marsh Teesmouth



Bullfinch at Barton



Kingfisher at Bolton on Swale Gravel pits



## Projects - Carole Sobkowiak

### Tees – Swale Naturally Connected

This programme is a nature recovery initiative led by the North Pennines AONB Partnership and the Yorkshire Dales North Pennines Authority. This innovative programme has received £5.8 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and aims to restore, expand and connect habitats across the uplands of Teesdale and Swaledale enhancing wildlife and delivery of multiple public benefits.

They are working with farmers to fund a range of restoration measures such as reforestation, upland meadow restoration and habitat improvements for bird conservation.

The Club has been involved with youth groups from locations outside of the project areas to enable participant to understand the uplands and learn more about the countryside. Some of these have taken place at the Bowlees Visitor Centre in Teesdale and have included river dipping and the creation of a wild flower meadow.

Further events are scheduled for 2022 where we will focus on the children's activities.



## Special Reports

Botany is for Everyone - Falgunee Sarker

This social enterprising project is called Sensing the Wild, connecting visually impaired people with nature. The project was helped by the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and was funded by the Heritage National Lottery Fund. Friends of the South Park and members from DTNFC provided help in Darlington.

There were four separate experience events planned for 2019 in the summer, autumn, winter and followed by spring 2020. We took the visually impaired people out on a guided walk and some one-to-one support. Training had been given how to assist a blind person and how to make the wild spaces more accessible. These guided walks had one-to-one support.

We take nature for granted, but visually people cannot. Some people due to primary sight loss from birth have never seen the flora that we know and love. Others may feel they have lost the ability to enjoy recognition of flora after suffering from acquired visual impairment later in life.

We explored the local parks and woodland, touching, feeling the texture and smelling leaves, trees, bark, seeds, cones of trees as well as wild flowers with unique perfume across the changing seasons. Also we listened to the different sounds made by each tree. In 2020 another walk was planned but covid-19 restrictions cancelled all further walks. Undaunted I took visually impaired friends on a "virtual" walk through the same woodland route. At this time of self- isolation, this was one of the ways to bring some joy into their lives by recalling the memory of their previous actual walk together as a group.

When we touch the bark or the leaf of a tree, the senses have the power to imprint the accrued knowledge in our memory. So by repeating the activity, this helps visually impaired people to identify trees and plants on their own. Learning together should be more frequent. That helps to recognise and further recall the memory.

Botany is for every one. There is no reason why visually impaired, disabled could not identify plants, trees, and flowers for scientific study as well as get pleasure and fulfilment from this. We as a member of the DTNFC owe it to the general public with or without disability to make our specialist area of study accessible to others who would not normally have access of enjoyment in a different way.

So how can DTNFC and the BSBI help them?

Firstly, TRAINING is required to show how to assist the visually impaired on guided walks with one-to one support.

I have been involved with the project since 2018. We also involve other organisations, for example, the Bright Water Project is planning to provide

better access to the South Park in Darlington. Here most visually impaired people are in wheelchairs, some walk with specially designed sticks, some have guide dogs and some people have special arm bands attached to the arm of the guide.

They could independently access this park if we could install touch sensitive way markers and audio guides.

Ground Work, a local community project, helped to plant 298 plants in the educational biodiversity sensory garden. Plants were selected for their feel, touch, smell, sensory and sound qualities. Ideally they would feel and smell different with different touch characteristics. We use the sound of autumn leaves such as Aspen leaves, to hear and recognise wild life form.

There are many ways we could help those with visual impairment to enjoy botany and the natural world as there are many technologies available for support.

Alexa is a good tool and that could connect to the BSBI in a person's own home. We used this successfully during lock down. The BSBI could create a library of audible resource. Audible training guides could be heard on a mobile phone app or carried on a lanyard mounted audio guide with headphones.

Microchips can be embedded in a tree, and when a detecting device is nearby this activates the information and you hear the description of the tree.

Other ideas that technology can provide include:

Eye camera for landmarks

Hand camera for sign reading

Thermal sensing

Wearable computer

Magnetic field sensing

Range of combo for stair/ditch sensing

Range of tactile sensing

The RNIB estimated that there are 26,000 blind and partially-sighted Braille users in the UK and 869 children learning Braille in English schools. BSBI could develop simple botany books in Braille.

Nazia Jabeen from the Bangladesh Braille Foundation has produced 92 Braille books so far and these were distributed free of charge.

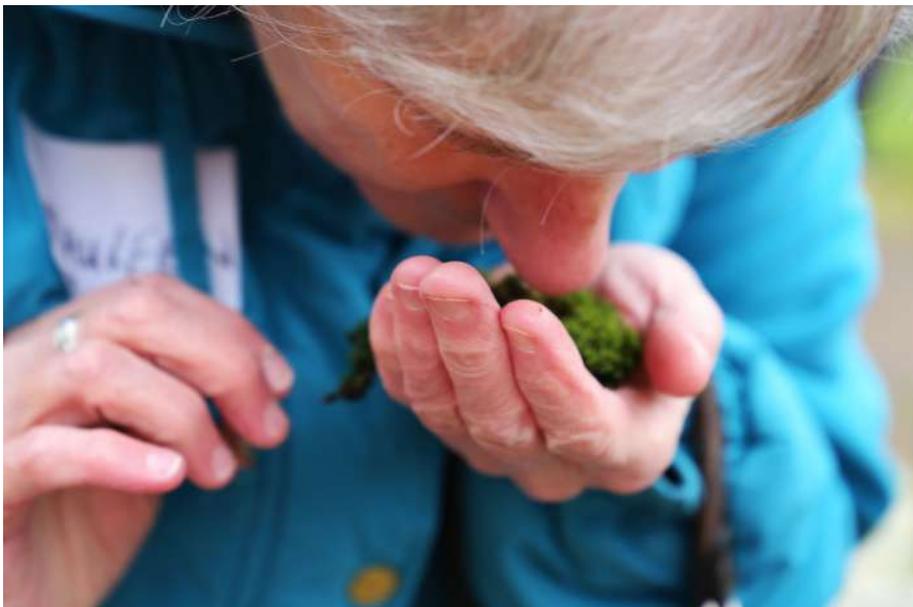
I would like to see our Field Club and the BSBI challenge themselves by asking

– "What are we and others doing for the visually impaired?"

BSBI could work with the RNIB to create an online accessible training module to ensure we know how to help people with visually impaired to learn botany. They could also have suitable outdoor botanical events as well as indoor events specifically chosen for their accessibility, without steep paths or uneven ground and with provision for hearing loops, for wheelchair users and provision for guide dogs.

I am trying to influence all botanists world wide as well as people with knowledge of the natural world, to come forward and to help visually impaired people to enjoy nature and all the plants in our beautiful planet Earth. This ongoing work has started at a very local level, but this can be implemented anywhere in the world.

I would like to thank Leigh Nicholson and Pam Bennett who organised the whole project and provided the training to volunteers. Also to Marie Hurst for taking all the photographs.



## Walk Reports

### 18/05/21 Brinkburn Nature Reserve - Sue Weston

This was the first Field Club outing for a year and half and the weather decided to be lovely after a rather wet day! Seventeen Members turned up and it was a lovely occasion to see everyone in person again, we also had a visitor attend. After a visit to the main pond we walked down the main path where there were two Coots with their chicks emerging from the pond. There were some flowers along the way. We then took a left turn along another path that led to a railway siding for the Whessoe Works and joined the line to Shildon from North Road station. This was a lovely area with trees, wild flowers and plants. From this path, we walked into the meadow area where travellers' horses were tethered. A small bridge crossed two ponds where a number of newts were seen - possibly Great Crested but difficult to identify in the pond water! There were numerous rabbits in this area close to the railway.

We then walked through the meadow area back to the main path and back to the entrance.

Birds seen or heard at Brinkburn Reserve

|                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Mallard (s)        | Great Tit (s)         |
| Coot (s)           | Moor Hen (s)          |
| Chiff Chaff (h)    | Swallow (s)           |
| Starling (s)       | Lapwing (s)           |
| Blue Tit (s)       | Wood Pigeon (s)       |
| Greylag (s)        | Black Headed Gull (s) |
| Oyster Catcher (s) | Pied Wagtail (s)      |
| Carrion Crow (s)   | House Martin (s)      |
| Willow Warbler (h) |                       |

### 1/06/21 Skerningham - Lynne Heslop

The walk took place on an unusually hot and dry day and was attended by 16 Club Members and 5 visitors, one of whom was Leanne Carroll a local amateur naturalist and photographer.

The aim of the walk was to give people an opportunity to experience what Darlington Borough Council has referred to previously as the "Jewel in the Crown" of accessible countryside provision. Unfortunately, there is now a plan to build houses here and move the Golf course into the area. This has been challenged by many groups of people and is currently being reviewed by the Government Planning Inspector.

We walked through open fields passing the site of the medieval village and then into Skerningham Community Plantation where David Green a local conservationist and illustrator was buried in 2004. A native Black Poplar tree

was planted directly over his grave with 6 further trees forming a circle around him. We then continued past the Welsh Hills and through the Hutton Plantation where we saw a number of White Poplars and Jill Cunningham discovered the most northerly sighting of Fenugreek Stalk Balls.

Leanne Carroll walks in the woods daily and has photographed badgers, brown hares, foxes and a number of red listed birds such as the Cuckoo, Grasshopper Warbler, Red Kite and even a Ring Ouzel.

On our way, back to the start of the walk we passed a couple of temporary ponds with mayflies and newts in them and finally the World War 2 pillbox situated to guard the East Coast Main Line.

Hopefully we will be able to enjoy that same walk for many years to come.

### **22/6/21 High Coniscliffe - Brian Wood**

Ten members participated in the outing along the River Tees, we met in High Coniscliffe and made our way down to the river. We then walked a good distance along the riverside path before returning by the same route, two members left the group and extended their walk.

The weather was particularly pleasant with warm sunshine and clear blue skies.

Botanists found lots of material to record, over 65 plants, shrubs, grasses and trees were listed including a very interesting plant commonly called Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, a member of the Goats beard family *Tragopogon pratensis* (Greek-Tragos-goat, pogon-beard) The yellow flower head of this plant exhibits phototropic response with the head pointing in the direction of the sun, activating the opening of the flower only in the morning – hence the common name.

Very few butterflies were seen but quite a few insects including Golden Longhorn.

A number of bird species were recorded but only what would be expected in that habitat.

Thank you to recorders Fal Sarker and Mary Atkinson–Botany, Jill Cunningham–Insects and John Turner-Birds.

### **29/6/21 Goosepool - Jill Cunningham**

Nine DTNFC members came on this evening meet to Goosepool - a small reserve to the east of The Whinnies squeezed between the rail line and road. All areas were packed full of metre high plants such as Meadowsweet, Tufted Vetch and Hogweed and the path margins gave us Yellow Rattle, Scarlet Pimpernel and Toad Rush. The large Spotted Orchids in the tiny end meadow were a delight along with a variety (27!) of grasses, sedges and rush, such as False Fox Sedge that gave many a discussion on identification. Few insects were seen as it was cool and an evening but the little Yellow Conch, *agapeta hamana* was seen amidst the herbage – its markings like a

'smiley face', along with a very wriggly, tail flicking Hoverfly larvae that caused much amusement. Many more insects and butterflies were seen on the day-time recce and the 'bird dropping' look-a-like moth, a White-backed Marble, *hedya salicella*, took me a while to ID. Oystercatchers flew overhead and Wren and Blackbirds, amongst others, were heard singing in the trees, (along with a number of trains rattling down the track). A big thank-you to Fal for the great Botany list and the grass/sedge/rush identification. The recce and walk together gave over 125 plants, 32 insects, 9 fungi and 17 plant galls – surprising for such a small reserve.

#### **4/7/21 Tunstall Reservoir - Sue Weston**

Eight club members met at Abbey Road playing fields and following the brief drive to Wolsingham and onto Tunstall Reservoir.

Tunstall Reservoir was a water supply storage reservoir completed in 1879, and now used solely to maintain minimum regulatory flows on the River Wear in northeast England. The reservoir was extremely low on water due to maintenance work being undertaken on our visit.

The walk started just beyond the car park and through a gate onto the side of the reservoir. There was a decent path and as soon as we entered this area there was an abundance of wildflowers. Betony was by far the most prolific.

We continued to walk along the side of the reservoir recording the lovely flowers and birds. The walk took us through a wooded area and onto the bridge at the end of the reservoir. As the path beyond the bridge was difficult, we returned to the car park for our packed lunches.

Following lunch, we walked on a path leading to the right from the car park. Again, by the side of the reservoir and the opposite way to the one previously taken. The area had pine trees and the flowers were slightly different to those found previously. We walked as far as the dam before returning to the car park.

Thanks to Jill Cunningham and Mary Atkinson for the recorded lists.

Jill stated that this is the only place that she had seen the Redshank gull in Co. Durham.

We could hear a number of Oystercatcher birds as they flew around the reservoir. The birds listed are as follows: (s-seen h-heard)

|                   |                    |                       |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Buzzard (s)       | Lapwing (s)        | Cormorant (s)         |
| Jackdaw (s)       | House Sparrow (s)  | Black Headed Gull (s) |
| Mallard (s)       | Chaffinch (s)      | Common Gull (s)       |
| Greylag (s)       | Willow Warbler (h) | Pied Wagtail (s)      |
| Curlew (s)        | Swallow (s)        |                       |
| Oystercatcher (s) | White Throat (s)   |                       |

The list of flora was so vast it has been scanned and sent to the Botany leader. Nothing outstanding found however a delight to find a great diversity of flora.

### **7/09/21 - Whorlton Village Walk and Indoor Meeting - Derek Risbey**

This was planned by Derek Risbey as a brief look around the village green followed by a meeting in the Village Hall followed by a cuppa and cake. This was a delightful occasion as it was the first-time members have been able to meet inside. Reports and outings were discussed.

### **11/07/21 Wolsingham Family Walk - Steve and Sylvia Keeney**

6 members braved the forecast of rain at Wolsingham and met at Abbey Road at 10am before travelling to the start of the walk at Wolsingham Recreation ground. It was warm and dry throughout the outing and we followed the route of the Wolsingham Family walk, a very pretty and interesting 1.5 mile circular walk. Details and a map of the walk can be found online and a number of information boards with route maps are located along the route. The walk has been designed to enable better access to the countryside for wheelchair users and families with pushchairs.

I asked the members to only record what could be seen from the footpath as I wished to provide details of what had been seen on the outing to Durham County Council and Wolsingham Wayfarers to thank them for developing and maintaining the accessible walk which is such a good initiative.

I would really like to thank Jill Cunningham and Mary Atkinson for entering into the spirit of the walk and agreeing to carry out the recording from the footpath only and in a timely manner to ensure the walk was completed without much delay. Which was just as well as we had just completed the walk and had sat down at the picnic tables at the recreation ground when the heavens opened and the forecasted heavy rain started. Members dashed to the vehicles to eat their packed lunch. However, this did not spoil what was a very good walk and I was amazed at the huge variety of flora and fauna recorded by Jill and Mary. 111 plants were recorded as we "zipped" around before the rain started. Of the insects recorded were Red Admiral, Ringlet and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies. Lots of small tortoiseshell caterpillars on nettle were also seen. 14 species of birds were recorded including Mallards with chicks. The bird feeders in gardens and in the caravan park along the route were well visited by many garden birds including Goldfinch, Nuthatch, Chaffinch and Robin. Thanks again to the members who braved the forecast, recorders as we walked and were rewarded with a very pleasant and dry walk with lots of interest seen.

### **13/07/21 Low Conniscliffe - Brian Wood**

On a warm and sunny evening 16 Field club members made our way to Low Conniscliffe for a gentle and relaxed stroll on woodland paths adjacent to the River Tees and across good tracks over fields. Some of the woodland paths had mud and pools of water after recent rain.

Over 150 records of flora were noted including shrubs and trees, notable among these records were the grasses Tall Fescue and Giant Fescue, Giant Bellflower was also seen in profusion.

A few insects were seen including 10 Dexiosoma Flies, which are mostly recorded further south, maybe they are spreading their wings and colonising our area.

A gall on apple was noted. This is the second record for the North East, Jill also had the first. Birds were also recorded though just the usual species, one highlight was a family of Goosanders a fairly common species of the sawbill family.

The walk ended with still warm and sunny weather.

### **17/07/21 Reeth - Brian Wood**

Eight members met at Abbey Road and travelled to Reeth where we met another two. Weather was fine bright and sunny with the promise of high temperatures later.

Leaving the village on the paved path past the National Parks Centre we headed west in the direction of Healaugh, the paved path gave way to field tracks over pasture with numerous stiles to negotiate. Lunch was taken in the shade of trees at Healaugh where we also discussed birdsong and calls. The return walk to Reeth was via the path by the River Swale though we had to rejoin the outward track near to Reeth due to the riverside path being closed.

On the day flora and flora were not in abundance though 57 flowering plants were recorded, very few actually in flower, grasses and trees were also noted. A couple of common fungi, several rusts and a few insects were also recorded along with insect plant galls. Nineteen bird species were seen or heard, all that would be expected in the area.

The promised heat had by now built up and all members were relieved to arrive back to the start at Reeth, most of whom enjoyed ice creams.

Thanks to recorders Mary Atkinson and Jill Cunningham.

## **20/07/21 Snipe Pond Field Club - Elizabeth Elliott**

15 Members and 1 guest attended the field trip to Snipe Pond on a beautiful summer evening. The pond is a former reservoir situated on the south west edge of Darlington close to the River Skerne.

We walked from the carpark through the mature trees to the pond which looked glorious. We gradually made our way round the pond looking at the wildlife. The waterlilies were in bloom and a Moorhen with 3 chicks was swimming on the pond.

The flora at the edges of the pond included Branched Bur-reed, Yellow Flag Iris and Kingcups all seeding whilst greater Spearwort was still in bloom. Many common species were seen in the grassy banks around the pond. A total of 114 species of flowering plant were recorded.

Insect life was still active in the sunshine. Honey bees and Bumble Bees were seen as were Large White, Red Admiral and Ringlet Butterflies. Also, a Harlequin Ladybird, Bur-reed Leaf beetle and a Celery Leaf beetle. A variety of Dragon flies and Damsel flies were admired.

Slowly we made our way back to the woodland and on towards the meadow. This area was ploughed and reseeded in the spring. Germination has been good and the area is colourful. Plants in this area were not recorded.

Finally, we went under the A66 road and looked at the copse of Field Maple which was showing seed and some large spurge which we think may be Leafy Spurge, *Euphorbia lathyris*.

Full lists of species are held by section leaders and will be put on local or national data bases.

## **14/07/21 Cautley Spout - Derek Risbey**

This was our only outing in August and it was an outing with a difference. 10 of our members had a very enjoyable day visiting a pub that does not sell alcohol. It is a Temperance pub owned by the National Trust.

We set off from Darlington on a very pleasant day and travelled to Kirkby Stephen and then on towards Sedbergh, about 4 miles before reaching Sedbergh, The Cross Keys pub is on the right where we parked.

The visit was organised by the YNU (Yorkshire Naturalists' Union) and Dr Terry Whitaker was the event organiser. After a health and safety briefing by Terry, we were left to ourselves to see what we could find and record.

Cautley Spout is a cascading waterfall, about three-quarters of a mile walk from behind the pub, dropping down from the east side of the Howgills Fells. We all walked to the end of the very picturesque Valley to see the waterfall.

The head of the Valley had been inhabited by a small Iron Age pastoral population. The remains of their enclosures from over 2000 years ago can still be seen.

By the side of the waterfall there is a very very steep climb, we watched people climbing to the top as we all remained safely at the bottom.

Lots of birds were seen: Sparrowhawk, Raven, Kingfisher, Grey and Pied Wagtails, Peregrine Falcon, and lots more were recorded by John Turner. As many of the flowers have now gone to seed we still did find some interesting plants, possibly the best find of the day was a Pale Forget-me-not, (*Myosotis stolonifera*) which is unusual and local to the area. We also recorded in Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) lots of Tormentil and Goldenrod, Wild Angelica, and lesser Spearwort. A substantial list on the day was made by David Selby.

## **24/07/21 Greenabella Marsh - Ian Bond**

Greenabella Marsh is owned by the company, Venator (formerly Huntsman Tioxide). Prior to the development of Huntsman Tioxide, some decades ago, this area was farmland, which was separated from Seal Sands by the current sea wall. Almost 50 hectares of Venator's land is left for nature and the company has had a biodiversity action plan operating for many years, which has included digging several large ponds/ reed beds. Roughly half the area is now wetland of one form or another, though mainly reed bed. Most of the rest is rough grassland of little wildlife interest but there is also some open "brownfield" land, including an area that the company created specially to benefit plants and insects that are characteristic of open habitats.

Probably no industrial site on Teesside has had more biological recording carried out on it than Greenabella, for example its bird list extends to over 150 species. Even so the Field Club will have managed to record some new species for the site and the full list of species that we recorded will be passed to the company for their records. As Greenabella is private land, there is no official access, but Venator were very happy to allow the Field Club access and a total of 16 members turned out.

Eleven species of invertebrate were recorded and, other than the common garden snail, all are likely to be new records for the site, or at least the first for some time. Perhaps the best of these was 11-spot Ladybird, which is usually a coastal species. The record recording scheme only has five records for the North East from 2019 and historically there have been very few records this far north. The strangest species, at least for me, was a ghostly white "something", with long appendages, which was swimming and burrowing, with equal facility, in a shallow pool in a small area of saltmarsh. I had never seen anything quite like them and the debate lasted some time as to whether they had tail appendages and were swimming backwards or ridiculously long antennae and were swimming forwards. It turned out that these weren't species from outer space, which was my first thought, but rather the mud shrimp, *Corophium volutator*, which is conceivably the most

abundant species on Teesmouth, other than nematodes. Shows how much I have to learn.

The plant galls were probably also all new site records and Jill recorded fifteen in total, including what appeared to be the start of Common Reed "cigar galls" *Lipara lucens*. If that's what they prove to be that would be only the second record of this species for the North East.

In total, 91 species of plant were recorded. It is likely that all of these have been recorded previously although the saltmarsh area does not appear to have been recognised as such until recently so the plants found there may be new for the site.

Birds were unfortunately in short supply, which was to be expected given the time of year and there was nothing of any note. Mammals were just represented by some deer prints and hare droppings and amphibians by a desiccated toad. It was the mammals on the other side of the sea wall, at Seal Sands, that were one of the intended highlights of the visit though and they didn't disappoint. Seal Sands is where all of the Harbour Seal pups on Teesside and, in fact between Lincolnshire and the Firth of Forth, are born. The pupping season is late June/ early July and some of the pups were still with their mothers. In total 82 Harbour Seals were hauled out. Also sharing Seal Sands, though not in the same areas, were 64 Grey Seals. This is one of the highest counts of Grey Seals on Seal Sands ever recorded.

## **26/7/21 Bempton Cliffs - John Turner**

15 members, suitably masked, boarded a 29 seater coach early on a sunny morning to take our socially distanced seats for the outing to Bempton Cliffs. Upon arrival we found the car park full and crowds all around the visitor centre. Many families were enjoying the fine weather and the freedom to walk around the reserve. Fortunately the observation platforms along the cliff edge were not over crowded and good views could be had. The Gannet colony was busy feeding the young birds and seemed to have extended further along the cliffs. However there was room for the large colonies of Guillemots (including the bridled variety) and Razorbills, all busy feeding young from fish caught in local sea waters. The Kittiwake colonies were active, but their numbers continue to decrease. The Puffins were more difficult than usual to find and have reduced numbers this year. Fulmars floated past on stiff wings but we did not find their nesting colony and Shags were roosting on rocks at the base of the cliffs. Other birds breeding on the cliffs were Herring Gulls, Ferrel Pigeons/Rock Doves and Jackdaws. Inland the chalk meadows and thickets had Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Redpoll and Reed Bunting.

Tree Sparrows were active around the visitor centre and a Peregrine and Kestrels were hunting over the meadow land. Around midday we had a great showing from a Barn Owl quartering the long grass near its nest in box held high up on a pole in the centre of the meadow.

### **31/07/21 South Gare - Sue Weston**

On a rather damp dull day in July, 8 Club Members and 3 visitors met at Abbey Road for the outing to South Gare. At the Gare Ian Bond met us and I'm delighted to say he guided the group on the way to see the best of the natural world in the area.

We descended on to the beach and saw different types of flora – Sea Rocket, Rest Harrow growing in the sandy ground. We walked along the beach and into the dunes where Ian showed us other plants, at this point the heavens opened but quickly passed thank goodness. Among the dunes we recognised quite a number of the plants. From here we moved on to an area known as Cabin Rocks and this was delightful. So many different plants that had taken root in the dumped slag from the Steel Works and this looked like a Lunar landscape. This area was a joy with so many different plants. Further down this area Ian showed us the Shrubby Seablite that was planted as cover for migrating birds. It did look rather odd but clearly gave great ground cover.

After recording the numerous flowers, we walked back to our cars for some lunch. After lunch, we headed to the end of the Gare to see if we could identify any birds. Again, we were lucky to see a variety. Thanks to Mary Atkinson, Ian Bond & Brian Wood for the recordings.

### **5/09/21 Binchester Roman Fort and Auckland Deer Park- Steve Keeney**

11 members and 1 guest went on the outing. In the morning we went to have a look round Binchester Roman Fort (Vinovia). The fort commanded the main road (Dere Street) from York (Eboracum) northwards to Hadrian's Wall. The fort was built to garrison a cavalry regiment and was a key strategic site in the early years of Roman occupation and control of Northern England and for nearly 400 years. In addition to its military function a large civilian settlement (Vicus) also existed outside the fort. Members enjoyed viewing traces of the Roman ramparts and Dere Street and the commander's house. Inside the covered visitors area the best preserved roman bathhouse in Britain was viewed. The site has many excellent information panels and drawings.

The group also viewed the tented excavations of substantial remains of a barrack block and military bath-house uncovered by archaeologists funded by Durham University, Durham County Council, Stanford University, English Heritage, Vinovium.org and the Roman Research Trust. A team from the Department of Archaeology at Durham Council is currently working on the post-excavation analysis of this important site.

In the afternoon we took the opportunity to visit excavations at Auckland Castle by archaeologists from Durham University before they are due to be reburied at the end of September 2021. Although it is known a castle existed on the site from 1200 hardly any information survives regarding the early medieval castle and there is a gap of over 500 years in our knowledge of the site until the earliest known depiction of the site in 1650. The remains of the medieval castle were fascinating with steps down to what would have been a barrel vaulted chamber beneath one of two huge towers guarding the entrance of the castle with wide foundations for very high castle walls. Again the post excavation analysis and report will be eagerly awaited.

We then went for a lovely circular walk within the 150 acre Auckland Park grounds.

Visiting the 18th Century Gothic architectural style Deer enclosure built by Bishop Trevor in 1767 to shelter deer. With a first floor viewing room in a tower for guests to have a meal and watch the deer. In bright and welcome sunshine we continued our walk alongside the river Gaunless admiring the many specimen trees in the park. Of particular note were the many ancient Sweet Chestnut trees with large numbers of spikey sweet chestnuts on show. We returned to the park entrance having enjoyed a nice walk in the pleasant park grounds.

### **11/09/21 Houghall Discovery Trail - Jill Cunningham**

5 members met up on this dry September day. We had a glimpse of the 'Durham Grand Canyon' caused by the run-off water of the 2009 floods before entering the woodland holding the remains of the old pit village. Plenty of information boards described the history of the site and the woodland ground was littered with bricks, old dwelling steps and a circular pit head. Bright sulphur-yellow blobs of the slime-mould, *fuligo septica*, were seen on an old trunk. Then a short detour to the, rather overgrown, ponds full of Bog-bean before heading along the raised waggon-way path. Here we found a plethora of Oak Galls - big green and red cherry galls, smaller hard pea galls as well as oysters, spangles, cola-nut, artichoke and 100's of silk-buttons.

Walking through Houghall old woods we came across fungi such as Dead Moll's Fingers poking their way out of mossy logs; colourful but slug eaten Purple and Ochre Brittlegills, Red-cracking Boletes and banks of Earthballs. Of the 5 lemony white Death Caps that I had seen on my recce just 2 days before - only 1 remained. Maybe they are not as deadly to slugs! More signage told us about the site of the old Agricultural College, (great soil but unwittingly built in a frost pocket), and also of an Isolation Hospital.

We were entertained on the way by large Leopard slugs; Sawfly caterpillars stripping Crack Willow and arching their tails when disturbed; huge dung beetles, with gloriously iridescent blue-purple undersides, trundling their way

through leaf litter and a tiny Lace-wing larva with old skins piled on its back as camouflage wandering across an oak leaf.

Long-tailed Tits chattered and Speckled Woods fluttered, but the highlight was watching the Harris Hawk being flown in the woods by the local falconry centre handlers.

Including the recce finds, 92 plants, 45 fungi, 18 plant galls were recorded.

## **18/09/21 Low Barns Nature Reserve - Fleur Miles**

10 Members and 2 Guests attended this very successful trip to Low Barns, a Durham Wildlife Trust nature reserve near Witton-le-Wear. The former farmland and former Tarmac sand and gravel pits stretch over 46 hectares and have been managed by DWT since 1966. Low Barns is on a breeding bird migration route to and from the moorland habitats of the North Pennines. Exmoor Ponies maintain the grasslands. The site has triple SSSI status due to the Alder Wood. The Alders grow in the old river channel which changed its course in the great flood of 1771.

51 flower species were recorded which included Red Bartsia, Elecampane and Devil's Bit Scabious. There were various rosehips and berries on display including the black rosehips of the Burnet Rose, Hawthorn berries and Cuckoo Pint berries. Meadowsweet was exhibiting its coiled seed heads.

Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Robin, Bluetit, Great Tit and Dunnock were seen on the bird feeders and a Marsh Tit was spotted. On Marston and West Pasture Lakes, we saw 3 Little Egrets, Cormorant, 2 flocks of Lapwing, Swans and signets, Coot and Mallard.

Galls included Silk Button, Spangle, Pea and Oyster all on Oak leaves, Alder Tongue Gall, Willow Bean Gall and Germander Speedwell Gall.

Halfway around the circular walk, a wasp nest was discovered at the base of a tree and a Spiked Shield Bug dropped down onto some shrubs. On the day of the recce, 28th August, Speckled Wood butterflies were on the wing.

There were approximately 5 different species of fungi all of which seemed to be white in varying forms from toadstools to crusts.

The Reed Bed Ponds were worth a visit where we saw Common Darter and Migrant Hawker Dragonflies, Water Boatman, Pond Skater and a glimpse of a spider with a white back running across the pond vegetation.

Everyone met back at the Visitors Centre for tea and cake and ice-creams. I would like to thank Judith Dyke for recording the flowers and Brian Wood and John Turner for recording the birds.

## **21/09/21 Winnies - Falgunee Sarker**

Whinnies always present us with surprises. There was a sedge growing in the corner of the pond. Although last two years pond area was out of bound. This sedge is Galingale, *Cyperus longus* is the latin name. A three-angled sedge taking up a large area with its creeping rhizomes. It is in flower now and surrounded by very long leaf-like bracts at the base. It is also planted in many sites. *Cyperus longus* is a red data list species in Great Britain.

## **26/09/21 Teesmouth - John Turner**

Eight members met at Abbey Road on a dry cool day to make their way to our first stop at RSPB Saltholme reserve.

We first walked to the Saltholme pool hide via the dragonfly ponds.

Dragonflies were plentiful along this route, including Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker and Common Darter and we were able to watch a pair of dragonflies ovipositing in one of the pools. This pool also contained a rare water plant, Stone Wort, noted for growing in freshly created ponds. The Saltholme pool was very dry with the much dried out mud and even grass growing where water is normally found. As a result, the birds were a long way from the hide and telescopes were needed to see the many Golden Plovers and Lapwings on the causeway rocks. An Avocet was spotted among these large waders and two Little Egrets were feeding along the water's edge. Many Greylags and Canada Geese were present both in and out of the water.

After lunch at the Visitors centre, we walked to the "Alice in Wonderland" site to view the far end of the main lake. Little Grebes and Gadwall ducks were noted.

We then moved on to the viewing platform overlooking the new saltmarsh next to Greetham Creek. We saw Redshank and the find of the day, a lively Spoonbill feeding among the Little Egrets (7) in one of the creeks. After spending some time with the Spoonbill, we walked to the seal viewing screen to view the seals in Greetham creek swimming in with the incoming tide from Seal Sands. Gulls, Redshanks and Curlews were numerous on the mud banks along the creek.

A walk along the Creek to the tidal pools gave us Shelduck and a flock of Dunlin.

Enjoyable as this visit was, it was clear the we were too late to see many of the summer visitors such as warblers, Little Ring Plover and terns and too early to see the many winter visitors expected in the area.

## 2/10/21 Fungus Foray - Jill Cunningham

Seven of us braved the weather to visit Toy Top, a small woodland on the A68 halfway between Darlington and West Auckland. Once a picnic area, now the children's wooden fort, boards with nursery rhymes and ponds are long since gone and an abandoned toilet block, decaying picnic tables and bird boxes are all that remain. However, it does have a good range of mature tree species and plenty of fallen wood which, along with the lack of footfall, makes it ideal for fungi.

A multitude of black Dead Moll's Fingers, *xylaria longipes*, protruded eerily through mossy logs while others were decorated with ochre clumps of Sulphur Tuft, *hypholoma fasciculare*, and softer Deer Shields, *pluteus cervinus*. Yellow Stags-horn (Jelly Antler), *calocera viscosa*, sprouted from a pine stump and numerous Blackening Brittlegills, *russula nigricans*, and Clustered Toughshank, *collybia confluens*, were scattered in the undergrowth. In September I'd found several perfectly sculptured, porcelain-like, blue Aniseed Funnels, *clitocybe odora* a less common find in the NE, so the single one found on the day was a good sighting. We faced an Arctic wind along the western edge to find the Fly Agaric, *amanita muscaria*, and I clearly suffered brain-freeze when we came across a group of big, chunky boletes, only later did the obvious ID come to me – Penny Buns, *boletus edulus*, (also known as Ceps or Porcino), a new record for the woodland.

All together our valiant team found over 40 species before heading home for much needed warmth, just as the forecasted rain arrived. My thanks must also go to Stephen Hopper who 'adopted' this woodland over Covid times. He has done a sterling job on clearing paths from years of overgrown brambles and litter and regularly contacts me about the variety of fungi he sees there.

## **OBITUARY – DON GRISS**

Don Griss passed away in March 2021 aged 82 after fighting 2 years of poor health. He was actively involved in his interests in watching and recording natural history until the last few weeks of his life.

Don was born in Hartlepool in 1939 and was evacuated with his mother and brother to Gunnerside in Swale Dale after the start of the Second World War, to avoid the bombing of Tees-side. Here he learned to enjoy country life and the wildlife that surrounded him. A love that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

After the war his family moved to Darlington where Don was educated at the Darlington Grammar School. After leaving school he worked briefly as a porter at Banktop Station before doing National Service. After demob he joined ICI as a lab technician and stayed with the company until early retirement. He told many tales of work in Chemical process development during his career.

Retirement allowed Don to spend full time on his wildlife studies, including gaining a MSc in Environmental Science at Durham University. He travelled widely to India, Canada, Spain and wildlife localities in UK. His main area of study was Teesdale and Teesmouth, where he was recognised as an authority on the bird life. He was knowledgeable in many other areas of zoology and carried out small mammal surveys in this region, latterly being the mammal recorder for County Durham. He was the ornithology leader of the Field Club for many years and was a valued bird guide on the Field Club visits to Northern Finland, Portugal and the Isle of Mull

After RSPB Saltholme Reserve was opened Don became one of their leading volunteers and spent many Sundays as a bird guide. Eventually Saltholme became his “second home’ according to his family. As well as doing early morning (dawn) surveys on nesting waders he established small mammal surveys and trained others to do this valuable work.

Don was married twice. His first wife, Anne, passed away when their daughter was 14 and Don was then responsible for her upbringing. He met Mary, his second wife, when they were both members of the Field Club. It is said that their first date was a visit to Bolton on Swale gravel pit, a favourite birding site for Don.

Don is sadly missed by the Field Club and will be fondly remembered for many years.