



*South Yorkshire Branch
Newsletter
Spring 2020*

Editor Pauline Rutherford M.B.N.A. Issue number 30



Bearded Tit or Reedling by K. Hinchcliffe

The Current Situation with Covid-19

Because of the lockdown caused by coronavirus, our April meeting to Attenborough Nature reserve is cancelled, future meetings are also at risk of cancellation. Therefore, I am not putting the usual regular column for meeting dates in this issue.

I will be sending out the summer programme later this month and will keep you informed via email for future meetings.

The Summer newsletter will be about our Lock-down sightings and stories

I emailed you all recently asking you to note what you have seen **during the first few weeks of our isolation** so I can produce a special issue focusing on how nature is carrying on as normal despite the restrictions for us mere humans!

Please let me know what you have seen in your gardens or as you have been taking your daily walks. An article (up to 200 words) or a list of species.

Please send me your contributions as soon as you can, prutherford161@btinternet.com

Hare in the Peak District

By David Hughes

Over the past five years I have spent many days on the moors of the Dark Peak in winter, monitoring changes to ground water levels as part of the programme to restore sphagnum moss to the degraded moors. One of the pleasant side benefits has been the opportunity to observe mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*) on many occasions and to record them for the NBN. It is a very simple task with a smart phone, and I have got into the habit whenever I see a hare. In the process I have become interested in why they are here, where they came from and what is happening to them.



Mountain Hare © Flickr

The mountain hare is a separate species from the brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) of the lowlands which was introduced to Britain around the Roman occupation. It is smaller a bit more rounded and compact. Its most distinctive difference is that its coat becomes white in the winter. More on that later.

Although the mountain hare is indigenous to Britain It could also be said that it doesn't belong here in the Peak District. During the Victorian fad for shooting everything that moved mountain hare were introduced from Scotland to estates all over England and Wales in the 1850s. The Peak District is the only surviving population which is a bit surprising as similar ecosystems exists all the way up to the Scottish borders and in many parts of Wales.

The Peak District population has thrived despite the continuing legal shoots. During the winter the population fall to around 1,000 pairs but during the breeding season there can be as many as 10,000 hares in the area. One of the reasons is the relative absence of predators. There are not many birds or animals big enough to take a healthy adult hare. Foxes are a rarity on the moors and birds of prey will only take young or sick animals. Mountain hare do not interbreed with brown hare although they do overlap on the moorland edges around 300m altitude. They can have two or even three broods in a good year. Traces of them are very evident from their droppings, which can be found in great quantities all over the moors. When I am doing botanical quadrats in the summer hare droppings are virtually everywhere.

One of the questions which intrigues me is how they have adapted from the harsh snowy conditions of winter in the Cairngorms to our less snowy winters. One of the reasons they are so easy to see in winter is that they have retained their white coats to suit the Cairngorms, so they stand out in our much less snowy winter. In fact, the white fur is mostly temperature dependent rather than being governed by snow conditions. One of the outcomes of our recording efforts has been to track the level of mismatch between their white coats and our white weather. There are some signs that they are slowly adapting but they are still well out of sync with our southern climate. Given that it is just as well there are not too many predators around.

If you want to see our local hares, I can recommend Bleaklow Moor and Derwent Edge. During the winter they stand out and are easy to see in the day when there is no snow about. In summer your best chance is to get out at dusk or dawn though when they are mating, which can be anytime from January to June. You might catch a courting male being "boxed" by a reluctant female. Surely a sight to inspire any naturalist!

BNA Meeting - Old Moor RSPB Reserve
02 February 2020
By Jean Panniker

On an initially dull and drizzly Sunday morning in early February eighteen of our group met in the car park at Old Moor for a bird watching morning led by Kevin. Even as we stood around waiting for everyone to arrive the keen eyed amongst us (Mark!) saw bullfinches, mistle thrush, robin and magpie.

Kevin gave us an interesting introductory talk, explaining how much the area had changed from when he was a 'bairn', when coal mining was still active and when he played on the heaps of waste. With the demise of the coal mining industry in South Yorkshire Barnsley metropolitan borough council created the reserve in 1998 and the RSPB took over management in 2003. Interestingly the site was initially offered to the wetlands trust but at the time they were developing the London wetlands centre and didn't have the finances to take it on. Kevin also had two very interesting maps of the Old Moor area from very different periods, highlighting the changes that have occurred.

After recently receiving £1m of lottery funding change is afoot at Old Moor and the reserve is undergoing considerable development. Currently a work in progress, it remains to be seen whether the disturbance to some habitats will adversely affect the biodiversity of the site or whether it will be possible to successfully tread the fine line between visitor accessibility and preservation of varied, natural ecosystems.

Making our way through reception towards the reed bed hide we saw blue and long tailed tits, goldfinch, chaffinch and one greenfinch, dunnock, blackbird and pheasant. Flitting between the reeds we saw a small group of reed buntings (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), the male distinctive by its black head and throat with white neck collar and underparts and heavily streaked brown back.

Around the corner was, for me, the spot of the day - a male common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). Perched on a low branch it could be clearly seen through binoculars and the absence of a red base on the lower side of the beak showed it was male - Di very helpfully told us that in the wild only female kingfishers wear lipstick!



Kingfisher by D. Farrar and pellet by J. Panniker

By now the rain had stopped, the skies had cleared and the reed beds appeared golden in the sunlight. Sadly, I didn't see any bearded tits. These are more accurately known as bearded reedling and are the only species in the family *Panuridae*. A small orange brown bird with a long tail, the male has a grey head with notable black moustaches (not beard!) They have a distinctive low metallic 'pinging' call and are more likely to be seen in the winter as they feed off the seeds on the reed seed heads. In the summer they eat reed aphids.



Male and female bearded tits by K. Hinchcliffe

Moving on to the reed-bed hide we heard the distinctive 'horse whinnying' call of the little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), also known as the dab chick. Within the hide we saw an assortment of ducks and waders; pochard, tufted duck, gadwall, mallard, cormorant (with their white thigh patch showing they were in their breeding plumage), Canada geese, coot, moorhen and heron, whilst a buzzard soared and a kestrel hovered in the distance.

On our way back another visitor told us he had also seen the kingfisher and that it had regurgitated a pellet onto one of the wooden posts by the pond. Obviously, our group headed back to have a look, take some photos and collect it in a specimen pot. The pellet was about 2cm long, ovoid with an uneven, greyish surface. Apparently, they are made up of fish bones and other indigestible remains - what exactly was in ours will probably be the subject of another article!

As we wandered back to the cafe for a warming cuppa I reflected on what a wonderful variety of birds we had seen, some comfortingly familiar and others surprisingly exotic. We had had a thoroughly interesting meeting, expertly led by Kevin and in total I recorded 29 species.

A View from a Comfy Chair

From the Chairman

Photos are so useful for the amateur naturalist; they can allow the photographer time to study the species at leisure to help obtain an accurate identification. They will stand, quite often as a record of a sighting, especially if it is a rare or unusual species. Photos for records don't have to be perfectly shot for ID and cameras on phones now are more than adequate for this purpose. I am sure that we have all heard the cry, however, when the group has been on a meeting, "Kev, I need a photo here" or "Mike, you got that?" Or, "Di, over here" as a record shot is needed. It is not just about having an expensive camera; these Naturalists have spent a massive amount of time in the field seeing how a mouse moves or birds fly. They know which flower to photograph or that the underwing of the orange tip butterfly is interesting. In other words, they are experienced Naturalists. And to show this point, have another look at the front cover of this newsletter!



Kev taking a photo of Tim Gardiner and Roy in Brightlingsea 2018 by P. Rutherford

Wish I Had My Camera!

By S. Rutherford FBNA

It's just like the thing, in the car, coming back to the house when I notice sitting on the telegraph wire on the outskirts of the neighbouring village a starling. This starling, however, had what looked at first a thick neck. This thick neck turned into a crest that ran down to the shoulders. A second look I saw that the bird was two tone – light coloured on the belly and part of the back; the rest looked as dark as I would expect from a starling. For those who haven't got it this was a rose-coloured starling, a vagrant to our shores with very few turning up each year except every now and then when there is an eruption year. I saw this in the village of Barningham in Suffolk, and no. I didn't have my camera in the car!

A couple of days before the above Pauline and I were walking around to visit Joan and Robert Clegg's house in Riddleswoth when a large bird of prey flew towards us being mobbed by some crows. This bird looked at a distance like a marsh harrier, as it got closer the shape was more buzzard like but with slightly longer wings than the common buzzard. The bird was also much bigger and heavier than the crows with a more stable flight than a common buzzard. This was a rough-legged buzzard on migration further north to its breeding grounds in Scandinavia. Again, where was my camera!

Records from the Scientific Recorder 2019

by Mark Dudley MBNA

I have been doing the records now for 6 years and its always interesting when I am putting my notes together for the AGM to recap on what we have seen at our meetings. These records are collated in a database I keep locally with many of the records particularly the birds and insects sent to the national organisations such as BTO or iRecord. I find it a fascinating way to learn about natural history and using the NBN atlas website I can determine whether a species is local, uncommon, rare, under-recorded or moving north due to climate change. So much information can come from records kept I would encourage everyone to keep a record throughout the year, log it in a book and maybe check some of their new sightings with the NBN atlas. Catherine and I have a tradition on New Year's Day review our previous years sightings, having underlined/highlighted with a marker pen the key sightings of each visit, this provides a quick memory jog to the previous year's records before starting the new listings for the year.

I begin our review of the last year with Wentworth Garden Centre (WGC) a base we use regularly and often where you will find Steve and Pauline, particularly Steve who is very proud of his long grass area (LGA), as so many of the records come from their visits. There was no increase in the number of birds seen this year which still stands at 82, Steve again whilst on duty doing the ice-rink, seeing a skein of Pink footed geese flyover for the 2nd year running obviously a geese flight path.

From moth trapping surveys there were 4 new macro moths – Marbled minor (*Oligia strigili*), Eyed hawk-moth (*Smerinthus ocellata*), Common emerald (*Hemithea aestivaria*), and Varied coronet (*Hadena compta*), all quite common with the latter 3 being more commonly found in the southern half of England.

No new micro moths, mammals including bats, trees, ferns, fungus, mosses, liverworts, or lichens sighted but there were 5 new insects recorded – Meadow plant bug (*Leptopterna dolabrata*), Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*) and the Holly leaf miner (*Phytomyza*), 2 new hoverflies, Spotted meliscaeva (*Melisceava auricollis*) and the Hornet fly (*Volucella zonaria*) which has moved up north in the last few years from London, potentially due to global warming, with its first records in S.Yorkshire this year. It's the largest British hoverfly at just under 20mm and resembles a hornet with its mahogany brown thorax and black and yellow abdomen a disguise that allows it to lay its eggs in wasp nests where the grub lives off the larvae until it pupates.

There were 18 additions to the flower records as a result of the LGA most being quite common but ones of particular interest due to being new additions to our listings at any site were Beaked hawkbeard (*Crepis vesicaria*), Mouse-ear hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*), Heath speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), Oxford ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*), Square-Stalked Willowherb (*epilobium tetragonum*).

Two new spiders for our listings the Sputnik spider (*Paidiscura pallens*) and the Candy stripe (*Enoplognatha ovata*) both very visual spiders the former have an egg-case that looks like the Sputnik Russian satellite and the latter with its candy looking appearance of two red stripes along its abdomen.

There were 4 new beetles a Soldier beetle (*Cantharis paludosa*) a typical northern species, Malachite beetle (*Malachius bipustulatus*) a not too uncommon green metallic beetle with a red tip at the base of the abdomen, Hawthorn leaf beetle (*Lochmaea crataegi*) and a Sun beetle (*Amara aenea*). There was one additional grass noted Meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and a new millipede (*Cylindroiulus caernleocinctus*).

The final 2 additions to the records were 2 new bees the Early mining bee (*Andrena haemorrhoa*) and Willughby's leafcutter bee (*Megachile willughbiella*). In conclusion the number of species noted at the site is 786 species, an increase of 38 species. Please check the BNA website, for the full listings and % occasions noted.

<https://yorkshire.dev.bna-naturalists.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/06/W.Gdn-Centre-species-lists.pdf>

Again, we have ventured further afield in our visits through S. Yorkshire and beyond these are the highlights from those visits.

Elsecar (Feb) – 35 species including Wren, Goldcrest, and Goosanders but also a new lichen Crottle (*Parmelia saxitalis*).

Rivelin Valley (Apr) - 56 species of mosses, liverworts and ferns including 1 new fern addition Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*), 4 new mosses Lateral Cryphaea, Lyell's bristle moss (*Orthotrichum lyellii*), common Tamarisk-moss (*Thuidium tamariscinum*), and Waved silk-moss (*Plagiothecium undulatum*), and 2 new liverworts Overleaf Pellia (*Pellia epiphylla*) and Ladder flapwort (*Nardia scalaris*).

Thorp Perrow (June) – 38 species highlights being a Purple toothwort (*Lathraea clandestine*), a rare big-headed mining bee – (*Andrena bucephala*) only 100 records have been logged across the country. Several nice hoverflies including *Melisceava auricollis* and the Snouted duck fly (*Anasimyia lineata*) look it up its a beauty and a day flying micro moth the Gold-banded longhorn moth (*Nemophora degeerella*).

Bishop Middleham (Jul) – 75 species unfortunately it rained so we didn't get to see as much as we should have but there were a great number of flowers including Rest harrow (*Ononis repens*), Dark Red Helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*), Common twayblade (*Neottia ovata*), Fragrant orchids (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and Common milkwort (*Polgala vulgaris*) as well as a few nice insects Northern brown argus (*Aricia plagiata*) at one of its most southern sites, 5 spot burnet (*Zygaena lonicerae*) and a common groundhopper (*Tetrix undulata*).

Carlton Marsh (Aug)–105 species logged but not only did we see the Red-tailed bee (*Bombus lapidaries*) but we saw the Red-tailed cuckoo bee (*Bombus rupestris*). Unfortunately, summer had come a little early so the flower we had seen on the recce a Corn cockle (*Agrostemma githago*) had already seeded, but most people did see over 8 butterflies and the 5 spotted burnet moth as well as glimpse of a Kingfisher and Water rail a wonderful day.

North Cave (Sept) – 74 species a wetland in the making the highlight of the 50 species of birds seen being the Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) gleaning dragonflies around the hedgerows of which there were many including Ruddy and Common darters (*Sympetrum sanguinum* & *striolatum*), brown and Migrant hawkers (*Aeshna grandis* & *mixta*) and the three Green sandpipers (*Tringa ochropus*) who were passing through on migration and had stopped for a feed along with a Common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*).

Potter Hole (Oct) – I wasn't at this event but from the article written by Tricia indicated there were **24** species seen including the Amethyst deceiver (*Laccaria emthystina*) and one I haven't seen before Hare's ear (*Otidea onotica*) an additional 15 new species to the records list.

Wortley Hall (Nov)– 19 species of which we saw a lovely Beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*) an ancient Sessile oak tree (*Quercus petraea*) at least 360 years old, a place we will have to visit again sometime.

In total we saw **467** species throughout the year a grand total bringing the total number of species seen by BNA S.Yorkshire to **1653** an increase of 72 species (1581 previous) from last year although there are others to be included from other recorders that have sent their records to me, so this will increase.

Hopefully you will join us on one of the trips this year, if you do please consider making a list of what you have seen and either hand it to me at the end of the session or take it away and look up some of the ones you find interesting and let me know if you find anything a bit rare, or something that is uncommon, or due to global warming maybe expanding its distribution north.

Class of 2019 Star Species

From Mark Dudley MBNA

Elsecar article by Steve Rutherford



Goldcrest & Tree creeper by S. Rutherford & Di Farrar

Microscopy article by Catherine Artindale



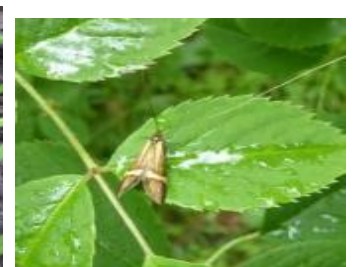
illustrated talk on the day Photos by P. Rutherford

Rivelin Valley article by Trish MacDuff



Common Polypody by K. Hinchcliffe

Thorp Perrow article by David Hughes



Purple Toothwort and Gold Banded Long Horn D. Hughes

Carlton Marsh article by Steve Rutherford



Kingfisher and Water Rail by S. Rutherford, Migrant Hawker by K. Hinchcliffe and Harvestman by M. Dudley

North Cave article by Catherine Artindale



Potters Hole article by Tricia Krill



Hares Ear Fungi by P. Rutherford

Wortley Hall article by Pauline Rutherford



Beefsteak Fungi by P. Rutherford

Wentworth Garden Centre



Conops quadrifasciatus, Machimus atricapillus and Volucella zonaria by S. Rutherford



Paidiscura pallens and 'Sputnik' by S. Rutherford

Information versus Knowledge?

By Pauline Rutherford MBNA

*"We live in a world of information; cyber space is chock-a-block with the stuff.
Half of it is accurate but boring, the other half just plain wrong and useless.
But 1% of it is of great value and 1% of that 1% is lethal."*

This quote comes from one of my favourite TV police drama series – "Lewis" written by Alan Plater, adapted from the books by Colin Dexter, creator of "Morse".

This episode – "Old School Ties" is about a reformed criminal from the northeast, with one of the worst Geordie accents I have heard! unlike the main character Inspector Lewis played by Kevin Whatley, who has a genuine northeast accent as he was born near Hexham (although not strictly classed as Geordie-land!)

When I watched the episode, it got me thinking about the information you can find on the internet. And you can find out anything all you do is type a word or a subject into your computers search engine and it comes up with pages of answers.

Some people are very good at using it (the technical term is googling!) I find a lot of the students I used to work with can Google a subject, then copy and paste, re jig it a bit and submit it as their answer. But start to question them on the piece they have submitted and the cracks start to form, as they don't really have that understanding of the subject.

As the quote states *"1% of it is of great value"*

Anyone can put something on the internet, but how accurate is the answer? You may even find several versions on the same subject then you decide which version you prefer. How do you know if the people who have submitted this 'information' have studied the subject or what qualifications they have to back up their information?



Some of the books in our library
Photos by P. Rutherford

Knowledge, now that is a completely different ball game. With knowledge you get explanations, theories and most importantly – evidence. And this knowledge can only come from books. Books which have taken years to write as the author painstakingly researches the subject, cross referencing, studying, producing the proof which forms that underpinning knowledge only an expert in a subject has.

I use the internet; for example, if I can't remember the scientific name for an insect or flower, I can type the common name into my computer and I immediately find what I am looking for. But if I wanted to find out more on that subject, I would always reach for a reference book. In here I can get everything I need as well as that all-important understanding.

The Oxford Dictionary defines **Information** as "*Facts provided or learned about something or someone*" And defines **Knowledge** as "*Facts, information and skills acquired through experience or education, the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject*"

I think the key word here is – 'experience'; doesn't that speak for itself?

We live in a very technical world now like it or not, and the internet is a marvelous thing but it's only a tool. Use it as you would use a screw driver in DIY, when you are putting up a bookcase to hold all those fantastic, essential and knowledge-filled books!

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