



**Longhirst
Wildlife and
Community Trust**



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2023

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the **Longhirst Wildlife & Community Trust** newsletter.

WHAT'S ON OVER THE AUTUMN

Kim Woolhead

Over the next two months or so, we have arranged several events which we hope will be as interesting and stimulating as those held recently (see below). Everyone's welcome at all our events and they're all FREE so please do come along!

If you would like to attend any (or all!) of the events, please book a place with Pauline Gilbertson by emailing her at paulinegilbertson@gmail.com.

Friday, 8 September, 1.00-3.30

DRURIDGE BAY NATURE WALK

Ho-Yin Wong from the Natural History Society of Northumbria will lead us on a two to three mile walk from East Chevington to Druridge Pools and back. We will look out for butterflies, moths, birds and flowers - everyone is welcome!

Numbers are restricted to 15 so please book ASAP Park at East Chevington near the turning circle (at the end of the un-named road running east off the Coast road opposite the turn to Red Row). Let us know if you would like a lift from Longhirst Village Hall, leaving at 12.30pm.

Sunday, 24 September, 10.00 on

HANDS ON EVENT FOR ALL AGES

An event for everyone, especially children, accompanied by parents or grandparents! We will start at the Village Hall building bird boxes, bat boxes and insect hotels and then move on to the Millennium Wood to begin the task of creating a bird feeding station near the hide and hopefully erecting some of our wonderful creations! The meadow also needs a bit of management (there are too many docks) so if there's time we could clear some of these away.

BATS – TALK AND WALK

We are hoping to arrange a bat talk and walk by a local bat expert during late September or October, date and time to be confirmed.

Saturday, 21 October, 10.00-12.00

NORTHUMBERLAND WILDLIFE TRUST WALK AT DRURIDGE BAY

Sophie Webster from NWT will guide us around the NWT East Chevington Nature Reserve where she has recently overseen the re-introduction of harvest mice. The meeting point will be as for the Druridge Bay Nature Walk above. Let us know if you would like a lift from Longhirst Village Hall leaving at 9.30am.

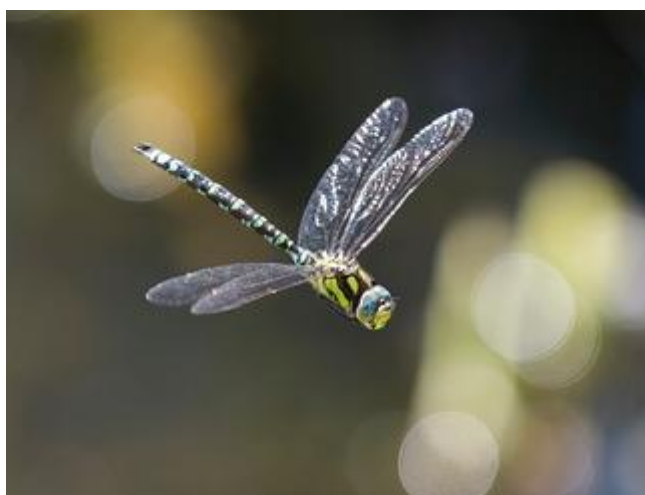
NEWS OF EVENTS HELD RECENTLY

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Pauline Gilbertson

Fifteen of us recently attended a Dragonflies and Damselflies walk at Gosforth Nature Reserve, led by Chris Wren of the Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN). Chris started with a short indoor introduction and ended by showing us a series of images of different dragonflies and damselflies (there are over 3,000 different species of these worldwide but only around 45 in the UK and 24 in the North East!).

The weather changed from unrelentingly bad to just about OK, and during our walk around the ponds on the reserve we spotted five different species of dragonflies and damselflies (we'd have seen more if the sun had honoured us with an appearance).



Southern Hawker

Credit: Keith Cochrane

A Southern Hawker approached us and inspected us with great curiosity, circling round and around our group but not stopping for a photograph; Blue-tailed and Common Damselflies showed no inhibitions when it came to demonstrating their mating and egg-laying techniques; a Migrant Hawker hung jewel-like in the reeds,

and a number of Common Darters did actually sit still long enough to be photographed.

Migrant Hawker
Credit: Pauline Gilbertson



Common Darter
Credit: Pauline Gilbertson

Chris also showed us a dragonfly 'exuvia', the dried-up outer casing which is left behind when a young dragonfly emerges as an elegant adult. A fascinating and very enjoyable session!

Longhirst Nature Walk

Pauline Gilbertson

Our 10th August nature event was originally planned as a Beginners' Botany walk, but we were concerned that there wouldn't be a lot of wild flowers around in August so I persuaded our expert leader, James Common from the Natural History Society of Northumbria, to make it a general nature walk. In fact there was a

surprising variety of flowers in bloom or just going over, and James seemed delighted to find, amongst other things, the rather rare (for Northumberland) Greater Celandine and Broad-leaved Helleborine (a species of orchid).



Broad-leaved Helleborine
Credit: Pauline Gilbertson



Cuckoo Bee
Credit: Pauline Gilbertson

We learned how to differentiate between Sessile and English Oaks and found three different species of Cuckoo Bee (which lay their eggs in the nests of other bees): Field Cuckoo Bee, Vestal Cuckoo Bee and the very rare (in our area) Hill Cuckoo Bee.

We also spotted a variety of butterflies, some yellow and black 22 spot ladybirds and a few dragonflies. Feedback was very positive and everyone was surprised to discover how many interesting species could be found on our doorstep. It was a very enjoyable and gently educational afternoon which we hope to repeat sometime.



22 Spot Ladybird
Credit: Pauline Gilbertson

Engaging People with Nature

Pauline Gilbertson

Several members of the group recently attended a training event entitled 'Engaging People with Nature'. Held at Gosforth Nature Reserve, it was a stimulating session led by two senior naturalists from the Natural History Society of Northumbria. We left with some good ideas as to how to run future events. We are ALL on a learning curve here!

THE TALE OF JACK THE JACKDAW

Linda Mowbray

Photos: Pauline Gilbertson

Jack (or was it Jacqueline?) came into our lives one hot evening in early June at about 10pm. He had obviously fallen 20 feet out of a very raggy, twiggy nest perched precariously in the eaves of a neighbour's house. He'd managed to crawl into the undergrowth and was squawking loudly. My son Thomas, who was home from Thailand for a few weeks, heard him; it was decided to do nothing until the next day.



The next morning he was still squawking loudly and my son picked him up. He had a covering of feathers but his eyes were barely open. My other son Edwin made a nest for him from a box lined with a dog's towel. We put him in the greenhouse and kept the door and windows slightly open, since the weather was so hot. He drank water from a syringe which we squirted into his mouth, and was kept cool with a makeshift shower. The next job was to find something for him to eat, so the boys went to an Anglers' shop and returned with live maggots! Jack was very hungry and we fed him frequently in the days that followed. Thomas then went back to Thailand and left us in charge of the fledgling. He grew, he developed more plumage, and his blue eyes gradually opened fully.

Eventually he hopped out of his nest and explored the space around him. Edwin made a perch for him to sit on and we put a mirror beside him so that he knew what a Jackdaw looked like. He progressed from maggots to dried mealworms and soaked and softened dog munchies. We gently pushed the food down his throat with a finger as his mother would have done with her beak.



Jack was now becoming really tame. He would sit on my hand and gaze into my face, climb up my arm and snuggle into my neck - and he knew our voices.



Eventually he was able to fly but had difficulty landing safely. Soon he realised that he could land on a low wall and then jump onto our hands. For the next week or so we would put him back into his box each evening, cover him with the towel, and he would go to sleep almost purring! The next morning he was ready for his breakfast at 6am.

Soon he was leaving the greenhouse, flying into the trees with the other birds, but coming back when we called. The neighbours, hearing us shout “Jack!”, must have thought we were mad!

Eventually Jack didn't come back at all. He must have made a few friends and we were happy for him - but we still miss him.

BEE NEWS

Peter Lovering

It's late August and normally we beekeepers would be jarring up our Summer honey. However, the bad weather over the last three months has devastated honey production. In fact, there were signs of starvation in some of our colonies and we have had to feed some of the weaker colonies from our stock of reserves, taken off the hives in Spring.



Credit: Peter Lovering

This situation is compounded by the lack of queens in many of our hives. In one apiary, only two out of nine hives had queens and generating new queens at this time of year is highly unlikely to succeed due to the lack of drones for mating. Moreover, hives without a queen will grow weaker as bees that die are not replaced. This leaves them much more vulnerable to attack by wasps.

Consequently, we have had to concentrate on strengthening our hives prior to Winter by combining weaker colonies and those without queens with colonies that have a queen. This is no bad thing, as the number of colonies expanded very quickly in the spring when there was an unusually high number of secondary swarms.

In normal (primary) swarming, about half the hive leaves with the old queen. A secondary swarm occurs when a new queen swarms and takes another half of the colony, reducing the size of the colony to about a quarter, severely weakening it.

Moreover, a secondary swarm is small and with only a virgin queen, it often doesn't survive.

In consolation, we had a bountiful harvest of spring honey and look forward to a better beekeeping year in 2024.

AND FINALLY....

Margaret Lediard sent us this record of an interesting sighting in her garden:

Thought I would let you know that this week we have seen a stoat on more than one occasion. We were fortunate enough to be in the conservatory when it took a large pigeon and dragged it off into the wood in our garden. We think it probably has young to feed. Since storm Arwen we have quite a few log piles and think it may be residing in one of them. Unfortunately I was not quick enough to get a decent picture but thought the info might be interesting to the wildlife group.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust *Greener Gardening Guide*

The Wildlife Trusts has created a Greener Gardening Guide to help people go peat free at home. You can get a copy of the guide on The Wildlife Trusts' [website](#).

Northumberland Wildlife Trust will be giving us an evening talk all about gardening for wildlife in March next year, just in time for the spring season. Further details to follow.

We have lots more planned for the next few months which we will reveal as time goes on, but if you have any topics which you would particularly like to see covered either as an article in the newsletter, an event or activity, please do get in touch.

You can email me at kim.woolhead@gmail.com and I'll see what I can do!