

How to spend a Bank Holiday Sunday in North Northumberland

Mora Rolley

In May 2012 North Northumberland Bird Club organized a Bird Race. How many species could be identified in North Northumberland in one day? We four, Winnie Banks, Ian and Keith Davison and I enjoyed that day so much we repeated the experience in 2013 and again this year. Without the challenge of competition we started at 0700 hours and spent the day driving leisurely around this glorious countryside, stopping in various places and appreciating the birds that came our way..and what birds they were!

We started by walking round the peaceful ponds at Branton listening to and spotting warblers, finches, woodland birds, gulls and waterfowl then, while looking across at the swathes of cowslips –



'There are two godwits,' 'Black or bar-tailed?' 'Lovely colour.' 'There they go. Black. Very obliging.'but the water rail did not oblige.

53 species identified. A good start. Time for coffee.

On to Hedgeley. A buzzard flew overhead being pestered by small birds; it wasn't a common buzzard but a honey buzzard with its longer tail, smaller head and different flight pattern. (I should say here and now that as a dedicated 'Bad Bird Watcher', a la Simon Barnes, my only job was as the scribe.)

Harthope Valley was our next stop to find the upland birds. From the hillside came the light, scratchy song of a whinchat and there he was sitting on a hawthorn bush. By Hawsen Burn a male ring ouzel was feeding on the field and then we were startled by a raucous sound. A pair of peregrine falcons flew over Winnie's head and up over the hillside showing us clearly the difference in size between the two. It was all too exciting! An early lunch break was needed but even then a male redstart was singing to us as we ate.

After the valley Ford Moss was very quiet, save for the wind in the trees, but a pair of ravens did come to look at us. The scrape at Hoppen Kiln was a feeding station for a wood sandpiper, greenshank and garganey.

Some sea and shore birds were needed but we called in at Spindlestone hoping a great spotted woodpecker and nuthatch would appear; they didn't. The tide was way out at Budle Bay but the gulls were there and -

'Keith, come and check, is that really a whimbrel?' 'Definitely.' 'Great.'

Bamburgh was seething with people enjoying the sea, sun and sand and we were very lucky to find a parking place at Stag Rocks and there they were out at sea, gannets, a red-throated diver, terns, auks, to add to the growing list.

Three of us were now beginning to wilt, one had to be held in check so after a quick stop at Monks Pool and some sneaky parking at Low Newton we saw a yellow wagtail and that Egyptian Goose that could be an escapee. You can deduct it from the final score if you prefer but we counted 106 different species in all.

2012 – 109

2013 – 93

2014 – 106

It just shows what a wonderful place North Northumberland is with beautiful scenery, varied habitat, amazing birds and what a great way to spend a Bank Holiday Sunday.

Article: Mora J Rolley

Photos: Ian & Keith Davison

