

Winter  
2021

Edition 7

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# *Rennington and Rock Community News*



## From the editors

Hello and welcome to the Winter 2021 edition of R&R Community News.

This edition of the newsletter features material from both regular and new contributors. We hope you find the mix of news, comments, information, and sharing of ideas interesting.

We decided to produce this edition in A5 format again and, as with the last edition, it is only in digital format too. This means that direct circulation is limited to people whose email addresses are known to us. Please feel free to pass on the newsletter to friends and family, and encourage them to send us their email address so that we can share future editions. In line with data protection laws, we will not divulge email information to others unless prior permission has been granted. Hopefully we will be able to revert to both printed and digital production once the pandemic constraints ease. It remains our aim that every household in the R&R parish receives a copy of each edition.

We hope you will enjoy reading the newsletter and be inspired to put 'pen to paper' and send in your contributions for the next and future editions.

Stay safe and well.

Jane and Robert Dixon, Editors

## Give yourself a break, it's Lent



Well, we find ourselves in strange times don't we? And I don't only mean the wretched pandemic.

We have just entered the Church season of Lent - 40 days leading up to Holy Week and Easter, taking its length from the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering in the

wilderness AND the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. Strange and mysterious stories, both of them. Lent is traditionally 40 days of self-denial, self-discipline, fasting, penitence and prayer. A season in which we call to mind our mortality and our sin. Not exactly a positive message in the eyes of the world yet embraced with enthusiasm and vigour by some in the Church, and accepted with a 'here we go again' shrug of the shoulders by others.

Lent is often marked by 'What are you giving up for Lent'? Simple (or not so simple) acts of self-denial that are intended to help us focus more sharply on our relationship with God. Lent is a season of preparation, an invitation to go deeper in our Christian life.

I can't be alone this time round in wondering whether Lent needs a makeover. Covid has wreaked havoc with all our lives, even those not directly affected by illness have endured life changing restrictions; we have been denied our freedom to do what we like, we have been isolated from loved ones, we are anxious, fearful and frustrated. Do we really need to give up more?

So then, to an obvious alternative. Take on something new instead. Sounds more positive? Except I'm too worn out, too fuddled, I just don't have the heart for anything more.

What we might need is a season of restfulness and refreshment, a time to focus on what makes our hearts sing in the midst of all this. Where can we find pleasure? In simple everyday things - routine, birdsong, reading a book with a cuppa, having a walk, listening to music, noticing signs of spring, watching the weather. Trying to use the time more gently, taking opportunities to do nothing much but to really appreciate it and to restore our spirits.

The story of Jesus is a story of grace, not of judgement. A story of love, hope, peace and joy. Let's give ourselves a breathing space to try to learn to enjoy life again. Not just in Lent but every day we have.

Rev Alison Hardy

## Parish Council news

Last March I did not imagine that we would still be in a lockdown due to COVID-19. The government has now announced details of when we can expect to come out of restrictions and we can all look forward to a brighter and safer future.

Since Lockdown first happened back in March last year the Parish Council has only managed to have one face to face Parish Council Meeting which was held in August. The remaining meetings have all been held online. Hopefully we will be able to resume the normal format for meetings in the village hall in the near future.

Development of phase 1 at North Farm Rennington has restarted however the planning conditions regarding the use of materials for the roofs and walls has still not been satisfied although construction continues. The slate on the roofs and the stone used on the exterior walls is being used at the developers risk and 2 new 'varyco' planning applications have recently been submitted seeking approval of these materials. These planning applications can be found on the county council planning portal. The closing date for comments is 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Damaged signs have now been replaced on the B1340 marking the bends at the Mason's Arms Stamford. Thank you to the residents who have supplied and installed the seats at the entrance to the Lonnen and a rubbish bin/dog poo bin should be installed shortly by the parish council.

Interested residents of the parish along with the Parish Council are seeking to develop a neighbourhood plan for the Parish and more information will be sent out soon, to all addresses via Royal Mail. Please look out for it and respond if you are willing to get involved or have any ideas you may have for inclusion in a local plan. The Parish Council still has 5 vacancies for Parish Councillors and would ask anyone interested in becoming a councillor to contact myself or any councillor. All our contact details are on the village website [www.northumberlandparishes.uk/rennington](http://www.northumberlandparishes.uk/rennington)

Kevin Burdett, Chairman of the Parish Council

## County Councillor report

### Coastal Path funding gets the green light

A grant of £100,000 has been formally accepted from Natural England to start work on the latest phase of the England Coast Path between Amble and Bamburgh. Known as the England Coast Path, work on the Northumberland coast section started five years ago



and the stretch between Amble and Bamburgh was given national approval in July 2020.

The county council will create the path and be responsible for ongoing maintenance, largely funded by the Natural England grant. Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Local Services, Councillor Glen Sanderson said: “We’re so proud to have the most beautiful coastline in the country and this will be another magnificent addition to the Coast Path in Northumberland with the sections from Old Hartley up to Amble having already been established. This latest stretch will take walkers past some of the county’s most iconic landmarks and is sure to be a great attraction both for local residents and visitors to Northumberland.”

The next and final phase of the scheme in Northumberland will run from Bamburgh right through to the Scottish border, and is still to be fully agreed.

### Everyone will benefit from Census 2021

Households across Northumberland will be asked to take part in Census 2021. The census, run by the Office for National Statistics, is

a once-in-a-decade survey that gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

Understanding the needs of the nation helps everyone from central government to organisations, such as councils and health authorities, plan and fund public services across England and Wales. Census outputs inform where billions of pounds of public funding is spent on services like transport, education and health, cycle routes, schools and dental surgeries.

Charities and voluntary organisations often use it as evidence to get funding. It helps businesses to understand their customers and, for example, decide where to open new shops. Plus, those doing research, like university students and people looking into their family history, use census data. It provides important information on population diversity, allowing organisations to know whether they are meeting their responsibilities and triggering action where necessary.

Census 2021 will be the first run predominantly online, with households receiving a letter with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablets.

Census day will be on March 21, but households will soon receive letters with online codes explaining how they can take part. The census will include questions about your sex, age, work, health, education, household size and ethnicity. And, for the first time, there will be a question asking people whether they have served in the armed forces, as well as voluntary questions for those aged 16 and over on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“The census provides a unique snapshot of our communities,” Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at ONS, said. “It benefits everyone.

Based on the information you give, it ensures millions of pounds are invested in emergency services, mental health care, school places, hospital beds, houses, roads, GP and dentist services.

“No-one should miss out. Everyone can complete it online with a new search-as-you-type ability and paper forms for those who need them.”

Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, kept safe for future generations.

For more information and advice on how to answer the questions, visit: <http://census.gov.uk>

### **Countryside Volunteering in Northumberland**

There are opportunities to volunteer at our country parks, local nature reserves and other countryside sites.

If you would like to help out with practical tasks, or simply report problems or wildlife sightings, please

email: [neil.dawson@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:neil.dawson@northumberland.gov.uk)

### **Alnwick Museum**

Northumberland County Council will work with partners in Alnwick to look at the possibility of a move of an Alnwick museum.

The council is now in discussion with the Trustees of the Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery and Alnwick Town Council about the possibility of relocating the Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery into the more spacious Northumberland Hall in the centre of the town.

The feasibility study would fully evaluate whether the historic hall is suitable for such a use and also look at its use for other council services in the town.

The Bailiffgate Museum and Gallery is currently located in a Grade 2 listed former church. It is run by volunteers and delivers high quality exhibitions which celebrate the history, traditions, culture and arts

of north Northumberland. It also showcases the work of local national and international artists.

It currently attracts around 10,000 visitors a year but relocating it to a more central location could help increase visitor numbers and audiences and provide more room for additional exhibitions.

Jean Humphrys, chair of the Trustees said: “We love our Museum building in Bailiffgate, and appreciate that being able to lease this building through His Grace, The Duke of Northumberland’s Trust, put us in a very privileged position which has allowed the Museum to grow and develop over the years. When the Museum started in 2002, we had no idea how successful we would become.

“Our success and our wish to do more to tell the story of Alnwick and to bring new and exciting exhibitions to local people has made us realise that we need more space. It is a testing time for Trustees and, in the current climate we need to be forward looking, resilient and sustainable.”

Lynda Wearn, Mayor of Alnwick said: “The potential of having a major tourist attraction in the town centre is an extremely exciting prospect. We also however understand that current users and the residents of the town need to be consulted on the proposals once they are developed and we look forward to receiving more detail as the feasibility study progresses.”

### **Northumberland Libraries**

The Library Service are organising doorstep deliveries to the most vulnerable customers in partnership with the Support Planning team. If you know a resident who might welcome a doorstep delivery of books, please let the library service know.

Unfortunately the mobile library will not operate its normal schedule, however the library service will be reinstating befriending

telephone calls. Alnwick Library is to remain closed. Fines on overdue books are currently suspended.

The digital library continues to be available and members can access hundreds of eBooks, e-Audio and magazines.

T Digital Helpline is also still available for anyone who needs help and with getting online or accessing online services. Call 0345 600 6400 and request a call back.

Library website: <http://mylibrary.co.uk>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/northumberlandlibraries/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/NlandLibs>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/nlandlibs/>

### **Northumberland Community Bank**

#### Genuinely for people not profit

Northumberland Community Bank is very different from a traditional high street bank. It is a bank that is genuinely for people not profit. It uses technology to ensure it is easy to deal with but still offers a personal service by phone or face-to-face at various locations across the county.

#### Members own the community bank

As a financial co-operative, it doesn't have shareholders. It is owned by its members who have a say on how it is run.

#### What We Do

- Savings accounts for individuals, micro businesses, charities and community groups
- Loans to Individuals and micro businesses (including start-up loans for entrepreneurs)
- Loans to individuals via employer payroll deduction schemes
- Provision of bank accounts and debit cards to individuals (coming soon)

- 3rd party secured loans for targeted disadvantaged groups
- Signposting financially vulnerable individuals to appropriate support services
- Provision of basic bank accounts (coming soon) and loans to support Universal Credit roll out
- Financial Education for young people
- Junior saver accounts

#### Our Member Benefits Include

- A safe home for their savings\* and potential for an annual dividend
- Knowledge that their money held with us is helping local people
- Free savings and loan insurance protection (terms and conditions apply)

\*Savings up to £85,000 are automatically protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. By Supporting, you know your community will benefit.

To find out more visit: [www.northumberlandcommunitybank.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandcommunitybank.co.uk)

Wendy Pattison, County Councillor

email: [wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk) mobile: 07779 983072

Facebook: Cllr Wendy Pattison

## Winter wildlife in our parish

In my Garden:

December saw a higher than usual number of tits arrive at feeders in my garden. A flock of at least 18 to 20 'Jacky blue caps', 3 or 4 Great Tits, and 3 or 4 Coal Tits all feeding with vigour in the short daylight hours and feasting frantically.

On two or three times each week I've seen a 'family' group of Long Tailed Tits searching through the fruit tree branches, and then visiting the nut feeders in late afternoon before going to roost.

Interestingly, on several occasions, at first light, the tit flock arrived in my orchard trees with a group of long tailed tits following, and then flying on.

One of the first birds to stir and be seen in my garden are Wrens. In the breaking half-light of dawn they appear at a garden pond and then search through the plants and walls alongside frantically looking for morsels. These birds are a delight and can be seen each day hunting out tiny creatures that we can't see.

December also brought one or two Goldcrests searching through the lichen on my apple trees, though these tiny birds only stayed for a few days. They are woodland birds and probably moved on to look for woodland offering more shelter.

This winter I've had many more Chaffinches and Greenfinches staying and foraging beneath the nut feeders for dropped fragments of peanuts.

Occasionally, as in previous years, Bullfinches have arrived to feed on maple seeds. Interestingly, on New Year's Day, a small flock of 5 arrived and seemed to stay most of the day, searching for seeds in various dead flower heads. Since then, the male Bullfinch has

returned with one female and has been searching for buds in my damson tree.

Throughout this winter I have had noticeably fewer Blackbirds and Thrushes, with a maximum count of 7 Blackbirds feeding on fallen apples. Usually I have many more and have counted 17 on several days in winters past.

This year I have had a single Fieldfare feeding on the apples throughout January and February. It was then joined by another one, most likely as the snow reduced feeding elsewhere. Both left as the snow thawed.

The Spotted Woodpeckers have visited my peanut feeders, with the female seen daily. A male appeared on 21<sup>st</sup> December, as if he'd been invited in readiness for the spring. He seems to appear only every 2 or 3 days.

Robins have stayed all winter as usual though started singing earlier in January than in past years.

In late January one or two Goldfinches arrived. I don't feed niger seed so anticipate that the birds may be scouting out territory for spring. I usually have up to 3 pairs nesting each year, on the tip of tree branches. Each nest is well distanced from others.

February saw Song Thrushes return and then a single Mistle Thrush, though it only stayed a few days.

Moorhens have been in the garden most of this winter, with 5 roosting each night in trees overhanging my wildlife ponds. They have also been feeding on fallen apples, though they also eagerly feed on fallen fragments of peanuts beneath the hanging feeders.

Dunnocks have been present all winter too and the males have started displaying since the snow thawed and temperatures increased.

Tree Sparrows and the odd House Sparrow have been present on most days.

Disappointingly, I've not seen any Redwings or Bramblings visiting my garden this winter.

At dusk on 3<sup>rd</sup> December a Woodcock flew over my garden and then over Southfield, perhaps en-route to feed under trees surrounding the Lonnen pond? Most likely this Woodcock had arrived under the full moon at the end of November.

A Magpie visited on 29<sup>th</sup> December and has returned occasionally. Wood Pigeons and Collard Doves have been seen every day.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January a weasel hunted through a border next to my terrace. It only took a minute to catch a vole and then disappear with his prey.

Occasionally a cock Pheasant has roosted in my trees.

A solitary Red Admiral butterfly hibernates in my coalhouse.

With the snow thaw and rise in temperatures bird activity has increased and changed. Collared Doves are gathering nesting material, Woodpigeons are courting, a pair of Waterhens have been mating, and the Blue Tits have been looking into nest boxes. Many birds are singing again now, each proclaiming their territory and signalling that spring is arriving.

In the Parish:

Tawney Owls were hooting again in mid-December. Barn Owls have been seen though not often. Disappointingly a Barn Owl was found dead by Brian Connelly, who recorded the leg ring number and subsequently learned that the bird was from one of the 2 broods raised within the parish last summer.

On January 9<sup>th</sup> Ruth Vaulks spotted a Kingfisher perched in trees overhanging the Rennington burn on Church Road. This bird stayed

all afternoon, returning to the same spot after being disturbed. I saw it again on the following day, as did others.

Towards the end of January a Spotted Woodpecker could be heard drumming in the trees behind Rennington Church.

In early February Woodcock were seen again flighting through Rennington at dusk and heading out to fields for their nightly feeding. Several have reported seeing numbers of Woodcock following the full moon in December, perhaps they arrived from the continent later than usual?

A Buzzard has been seen hunting the fields in and around the parish. Since January, resident Greylag Geese have paired up and some can be seen heading to the Hassocks on Lee Moor at around dusk.

Migratory geese have been seen flying over the parish throughout the winter and on several nights during the last week of January, skeins could be heard flying over just after midnight, perhaps starting their long return journey north. Geese migrate to the UK in one long flight. When leaving to return to their tundra nesting grounds, they fly in short stages to allow more feeding and to build up their reserves in order to be in best condition when arriving on their breeding grounds. Over the recent days several Greylag have been feeding on the fields at Lee Moor. Most likely these are resident Greylag, and probably juveniles, who flock together until old enough to breed.

Hares are now chasing in the larger arable fields.

Young rabbits can be seen already.

Grey Partridges can be heard calling at dusk.

After dusk and in the failing light a pair of Mallards have been flighting into the village and dropping onto the burn.

All will have noticed and welcomed the Snowdrops and the first Aconite flowers, heralding the start of spring.

An early Dandelion flower was seen on Church Road before the snow arrived in February. Nettles are starting to show leaf also. Early Daffodil flowers were seen near the gate to the church with many more are in full bud.

Again I look forward to hearing and reading of what others have spotted, both in gardens and when out on lockdown exercise.

I am hoping that hedgehogs will be seen soon as we seem to have a few living in gardens within the village.

John Watson

## Bookclubs

Bookclubs are great! That's not just my opinion, many people enjoy book clubs as they offer much more than just the experience of reading a book. I can think of at least five benefits of belonging to a book club.

1. Bookclubs bring people together
  2. Bookclubs provide a sense of community
  3. Friendships are made through bonding over the same book
  4. Bookclubs offer a chance for conversation and a social outing
  5. You will read books that you may not have chosen yourself
- There are health benefits too, reading is good for you.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/book-club/running-a-club/> lists the reasons why it's good for you to read.

1. It offers mental stimulation
2. It can delay the onset of dementia
3. It improves confidence and self-esteem
4. It can aid sleep
5. It reduces stress

For people who haven't been to a book club before then what happens at a book club? The answer is lots of things! My experience is that they range from the incredibly serious with lots of detailed analysis to the other end of the spectrum where the book is just an excuse to meet up, have a drink and socialise.

So what makes a good bookclub? Bookriot offers 5 top tips for a successful book club.

1. Choose what you want to read. It's no good choosing non-fiction if no one is interested
2. Don't choose a really long book, 300 to 400 pages is ideal
3. Be realistic with your schedule, even once a month may be too much for busy members
4. Important! Offer food and drink
5. Allow time in your meeting to socialise, it's meant to be fun!

So you want to join a book club but what type?

Single title book clubs are where all the members read the same book, this is a great way to open up discussion, share thoughts and opinions and gives members the intimacy of reading the same book.

Multi title book clubs are where everyone reads a different book and shares recommendations and reviews. Fixed title book clubs are where there is a list of books and everyone chooses what they want to read from the list, this means that at some point everyone has

read all the books on the list. Library book clubs offer a cost effective means of joining a book club as the library usually offers to loan the books and can offer a place to meet. On line book clubs have no meeting place but are often a good place to start if you are nervous about discussing a book, similarly 'broadcast' clubs offer a chance to join in without the pressure of a regular meeting.

So finally what to do next, if you are local and would like to join or start up a book club. Alnwick library are currently holding virtual author events which are available to book on line, they also offer a virtual reading group which meets monthly to discuss a chosen title of the month. Barter books in Alnwick also have a book club which meets on Monday/Tuesday evenings (in normal times) from 7 to 9pm. Some of the local villages also offer book clubs or reading groups.

If you would like more information, are interested in a bookclub or would like help to start a group yourself please contact me via email on [chris.c.phone@gmail.com](mailto:chris.c.phone@gmail.com)

Chris Connelly

## Church news

Although churches were allowed to remain open during the latest lockdown, the Priest-in-Charge, Church Wardens and PCC decided that it would be more socially responsible to keep the churches



locked and not hold any services. The Archdeacon was informed of this decision.

However, a range of services via Zoom, YouTube and telephone are provided by the Priest-in-Charge and the Curate with contributions from members of the Benefice congregations. These are available on Sundays and Wednesdays.

An Act of Remembrance was held at the village War Memorial in the Churchyard on Remembrance Sunday. The short service was conducted by Rev. Alison Hardy, the Chairman of the Parish Council laid a wreath and The Last Post & Reveille was played by Ron Creasy. Due to Lockdown restrictions only the wives of the aforementioned, the Church Warden and PCC Secretary attended. A few members of the public listened on the road.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to fundraise in traditional ways due to Covid-19 restrictions. On June 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, we opened an account with Easyfundraising.com which enables small donations to be paid to the account by retailers when supporters of All Saints Church shop online. To date we have twenty-eight supporters and have raised £172. Could I ask those who have signed up as supporters please use 'easyfundraising' when you shop on line - it's so easy and does not cost you a penny! The money is paid automatically to the church's bank account every quarter with £63.30 paid up to December 2020.

We were awarded a grant by Northumberland County Council, under a Government Scheme, of £10,000 to help with the fixed running costs of the church including the payment of the Parish Share to the Diocese. This amount will help us cover some of the costs of keeping the church in 2021. We have also received various donations some of

which were anonymous. Can I thank the person who put an envelope through my door labelled 'For the church'.

We are also raising small amounts by selling items on Ebay such as the old insulators from some of the electricity poles replaced by Northern Electric, and bird books donated by a parishioner.

The only general maintenance, apart from cleaning, undertaken during the year was some mouse holes were blocked up near the Font, and the gutters were cleaned at a cost of £125. We were thankful to Neil Cockburn for unblocking the tower drain which caused a small flood in the tower in December. This appears to have now dried out.

Some concern was expressed by Mr. Cockburn and Mr. Connelly regarding a crack in the castellations of the tower on the north side.

Comparisons were made with photographs taken at the previous Quinquennial (Architect's Inspection) five years ago and there appears to have been no movement in that period. We await the Architect's report in 2021. The Closed Churchyard area continues to be maintained by Northumberland



County Council who have provided very welcome work not only grass-cutting but trimming trees and hedges. NCC have also agreed to cut the grass in the Open part of the Churchyard free of charge when they cut the grass in the Closed Churchyard. This does not apply to trees and hedges.

NCC have also, at the request of one of the Civil Parish Councillors, re-pointed the outer side of the churchyard wall next to the road.

The PCC will still retain overall responsibility for the graveyard and continue to provide Public Liability insurance cover; future burials

will continue in the newest section, and interment of cremated remains in the area set aside for this.

I would ask relatives who have placed wreaths, flowers, etc. on graves/memorial plaques over the Christmas period if they would now remove them and take them home to place in their waste bins.



I would also like to remind relatives that containers of any sort whether they are china, plastic or basketwork are not allowed to be placed on graves without permission from the Priest-in-Charge. There would be a fee for this. Containers may be sunk into the ground above a grave without permission or fee. No glass containers are allowed and permission would not be granted for these.

Any containers not conforming to the rules will be removed.

Somebody recently asked me “What does a Church Warden do?”

The official answer:

‘The churchwardens are officers of the Bishop. They shall discharge such duties as are by law and custom assigned to them; they shall be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent (which in this context includes rector, vicar or priest-in-

charge); they shall use their best endeavours by example and precept to encourage the parishioners in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace among them. They shall also maintain order and decency in the church and churchyard especially during the time of Divine Service.'

My answer:

To do everything I can to ensure that the church and churchyard remain available (in normal times) for the community of Rennington. I have just posted notices on the church gate announcing the election of church wardens for the Parish on 9<sup>th</sup> March - if you're interested, give me a ring and have a chat. We are allowed two wardens.

Paul Weston, Church Warden, All Saints Church Rennington

Tel: 01665 577174

## Bird watching notes, spring 2021

Writing this in the middle of February it doesn't really feel much like Spring but it is hopefully uplifting (very necessary at the moment) to look forward to better weather and some warmth. This issue of birdwatching notes will concentrate on some of the common birds that we see in our gardens at this time of the year, based on our observations during the RSPB's big garden birdwatch recently.

Living in Rennington we see one or two birds that most people wouldn't see in a more urban garden, for example Moorhens visit us daily from the old mill pond up the Lonnen. Moorhen is a complete misnomer since the bird is not a hen but a rail and they don't live on

moors. They are however frequently seen around Rennington. In the summer they are followed by broods of small dark coloured chicks which progressively diminish in number as the stoats and other predators snack on them.

We also have regular visits from the Sparrowhawks which have developed a technique of flying south from behind the Village Hall, coming low over George White's back yard, then flying at speed over the hedge, across our yard and through the arch in the stone wall at the back of our house into our inner garden so that the small birds at the feeders don't see them until it's too late! Small piles of feathers scattered around the garden indicate success (from the Sparrowhawk's point of view) where they pluck the unfortunate target bird prior to eating it. Such is nature.

The commonest birds that we see in the garden are the small brown birds colloquially referred to as 'Spuggies'. These belong to at least

three distinct species: House Sparrows, Tree Sparrows and Dunnocks.

House Sparrows are the commonest, living in noisy gregarious groups and feeding on scraps and seeds. Although plentiful in number locally there is cause for concern as studies have shown a marked decline in



*Female House Sparrow*

both urban and rural populations over the last 25 years. The males and females have different plumage, note particularly the grey feathers on the



*Male House Sparrow*

top of the male bird's brown head and his small black 'beard'. The female has a cream coloured eye stripe on her brown head.

Tree Sparrows are a little smaller than House Sparrows, they are much less common

and listed as threatened due to a severe decline in their numbers. They feed on seeds and insects. Males and females are identical. Distinguishing features from House Sparrows include their uniform chestnut brown coloured head and the dark spot in the centre of their white cheek.

Dunnocks (referred to in older bird books as Hedge Sparrows) come from a different 'family' of birds from the true sparrows called the accentors. They are a rather nondescript brown and grey bird, similar in size to a tree sparrow. Males and females are identical. They don't have the distinct head colouring or black 'beard' of the Tree Sparrow and the male House Sparrow, nor do they have

the eye stripe of the female House Sparrow. They feed on seeds, worms and insects and are about as numerous as House Sparrows. Robins and Blackbirds are sufficiently common that I'm not going to write any more about them at present. In the remainder of this edition of birdwatching notes I will describe the various species of tit that are commonly seen in our gardens.



*Tree Sparrow*



*Dunnock*



*Blue Tit*

The Blue Tit is an attractive little bird, slightly smaller than a Tree Sparrow. Its colourful plumage combining blue, yellow, white and green makes it unmistakable. Blue Tits are plentiful; they feed on insects, caterpillars, seeds and nuts and

are likely to be seen in all our gardens. Its slightly larger cousin, the Great Tit, has similar colouring but is easily distinguished as it has a black head, as opposed to the Blue Tit's blue cap. The black line down the centre of the breast also tends to be more obvious in the Great Tit.



*Great Tit*

The Coal Tit is the smallest of the tits commonly seen in our gardens. It is much less colourful than the Blue and Great Tits with a greyish back and pale fawn breast.

The crown of the head is black with a midline white stripe at the nape of the neck. It has a finer bill, which makes it easier for the bird to get seeds out of cones on conifers. Its behaviour at the feeders is also different, typically flying in, picking up a piece of food then flying off



*Coal Tit eating seeds from a pine cone*

again immediately either to eat it in seclusion or to secrete it for consumption later. Coal, Blue and Great Tits often form mixed flocks

roaming through people's gardens, foraging for seeds and picking up whatever is on offer at feeders. Blue Tits and Great Tits often inhabit nest boxes but it would be rare for a Coal Tit to do so. The final tit which is increasingly seen in people's gardens is the Long Tailed Tit. Small groups of them tend to travel around together but they don't really mix with the other tit species. Several will appear in the garden for 10 minutes or so and then move on elsewhere, only to return later. They are unmistakable really, characterised by their lengthy tail and a completely different shape to the other tits. Their face appears rather flattened and the bill is short. They eat predominantly insects but in winter come to feeders in the garden.

#### Tim Walls

With thanks to Peter Fawcett for some of the photographs



*Long Tailed Tit*

# The Green Dog Walker scheme

Following communications from some villagers, we would like to direct readers to the following website:

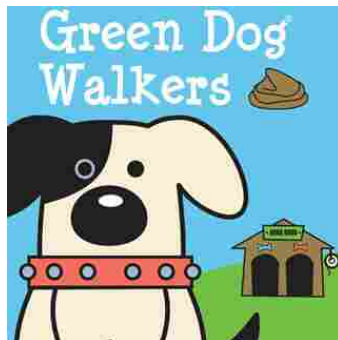
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Protection/Animals.aspx>

To quote directly from the website:

‘Northumberland is a beautiful place for residents and visitors to walk their dogs and the Green Dog Walker Scheme aims to keep it this way. We believe it should be socially unacceptable to fail to clean up after your dog and that you should leave only pawprints which is why we’re encouraging residents to become a Green Dog Walker.

When you join as a Green Dog Walker, you’ll receive:

- Free poop bags for you and to give to other dog walkers
- A green dog armband to encourage other dog walkers to talk to you about the scheme
- Leaflets to hand out to dog walkers, encouraging them to also take the Green Dog Walker pledge’



*Finally...*

*Would you like to advertise, or add your weblink to our Useful Links section, for a small fee? We are looking to local businesses to promote themselves in the Newsletter to help cover costs and continue its production. If you are interested, please contact the Editors. Thank you.*

Advertising rates per edition:

Whole page     £ 40

Half page       £ 20

Quarter page   £ 10

**Copy date for the next edition:**

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021**

## Useful Links

[www.renningtonvillagehall.co.uk](http://www.renningtonvillagehall.co.uk)

[www.southcroft-rennington.co.uk](http://www.southcroft-rennington.co.uk)

[www.northumberlandparishes.uk/rennington](http://www.northumberlandparishes.uk/rennington)

[www.alnwickmodelrailwayclub.co.uk](http://www.alnwickmodelrailwayclub.co.uk)

[www.rockcc.co.uk](http://www.rockcc.co.uk)

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