

## At the Coast with Mike Bloomfield

The Roseate Tern is always a target for the 'year lister' and to achieve this in springtime, when they arrive in fresh plumage with a flush of pink on breast feathers, a short boat trip is arguably the best option. The Farne Islands and Coquet Island are the two most popular destinations on the Northumberland coast. The Farnes can be visited from Seahouses where, in calm sea conditions, a trip lasting two to three hours can provide excellent close views of most of Britain's seabirds with an option (at extra cost unless you are a National Trust member) to land on Staple Island where a head covering is recommended to prevent the nesting terns drawing blood! A second shorter and less costly trip can be taken from Amble. This one takes about an hour but landing there is not permitted and viewing will be from the boat which normally circumnavigates Coquet Island and then holds off a small beach where good binocular views are obtained.

In high season, an advanced booking would be advised as boat passengers can be numerous. Also, weather and sea conditions can determine whether, or not, trips will sail. An early call on the day should prevent a wasted journey.

I took the Seahouses trip, with colleagues, on the 4th of June this year when conditions were calm and, on arrival, we noticed there were wardens already on the island, presumably ringing this year's chicks. This was good news for us because more of the adult birds were pushed from their nesting area onto the beach and much nearer for viewing and photography. A lucky shot picked out Common, Sandwich, Roseate and Arctic Terns all in one frame.

Little Terns can be observed a little further south at Crimdon Dene, just north of Hartlepool, where there is usually a nesting colony which is overlooked by a warden during the nesting season. Unfortunately this year and despite being under observation, there was bad news following disturbance and few, if any, birds were fledged.

A bonus arrived in the middle of July when a Caspian Tern (the world's largest) turned up at Astley Lake to the south of Leeds, giving excellent views. It hung around for a few days then disappeared seemingly on a tour of Britain via another sighting in South Wales before returning on the 19<sup>th</sup> for another day on Astley Lake.



Four different Terns (top to bottom): Common, Sandwich, Roseate and Arctic

photo: Mike Bloomfield



A newly arrived Chiffchaff displaying 'sticky feathers'  
photo: Brian Sumner



Chaffinch with advanced papillomavirus  
photo: Roger Nelson

Two interesting features which have been picked up by our ever alert members concerned both a Chiffchaff at Ogden and a Chaffinch in Upper Wharfedale. A Chiffchaff, which had newly arrived near Ogden Reservoir on 4th April, had feathers above the bill encrusted with a sticky material. A local birder commenting on this feature states that newly arrived migrants have picked up this residue whilst feeding. This comes from sticky deposits from *Cystus* or similar plants, common found in Southern Spain.

*Fringilla papillomavirus* affects Chaffinches and Bramblings. These growths may vary in size from small nodules to larger warts that engulf the whole leg. The warts develop slowly over a long period and affected individuals may otherwise appear quite healthy. Some individuals may become lame or lose affected digits. If you wish to report finding dead garden birds, or signs of disease in garden birds, you can do so through the RSPB Garden Wildlife Health, online reporting system.



## 2nd May Spring in Churchill, Canada - Ian Newton

Churchill lies on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay in northern Manitoba, strategically situated in the transition zone between boreal forest and extensive tundra habitat. The Churchill area is a four flight north of Winnipeg, and it's a world-renowned hotspot for birding opportunities. In spring and autumn, birders flock there to see the 250+ species of birds that nest or pass through Churchill on their annual migration. Ian illustrated his very interesting talk with superb photos of many of these species.

Around the edges of Cape Merry at the mouth of the Churchill River, where the changing tides bring huge ice floes in and out, skuas chase a constantly changing feeding frenzy of gulls and Arctic Terns, belugas blow loudly as they surface, and hundreds of loons, eiders, mergansers, scoters, and other birds feed, fly by, or drift with the tide waters.



Northern Hawk Owl

photo: Ian Newton