

Flamborough Wild Things Field Trip June 5th 2023

While the rest of the country basked in a heatwave thirteen of us braved chilly winds and cloud at Flamborough to explore the cliffs. The birds of course were undeterred although insect life was largely limited to a few bumble bees and a couple of Common Blue butterflies, plus a single Wall Butterfly, which wafted past too fast to capture. Flora were plentiful especially Red Campion, Hoary Sedge, Sea Thrift, Scurvy Grass and Bird's-foot Trefoil. I found only one Northern Marsh Orchid before we turned back for café comfort, probably because this late spring has been so dry.

Seals swam below, Gannets flew northwards on their way to Bempton, families of Stonechats fed on the clifftop bushes. The cliffs as always were noisy, crowded, smelly and fabulous.



Guillemots crowded the upper ledges (above). The density of their colonies has been found to relate positively to their breeding success, presumably as it protects from predators. They don't have nests, and the theory is that their pear-shaped, pointy eggs have evolved so that they revolve in a tight circle when knocked so don't fall off the cliff. This is disputed by Professor Tim Birkhead who thinks other factors are involved: the shape and thickness help prevent damage as the birds crash-land and squabble, and the blunt

end doesn't get so contaminated with excrement. (<https://bou.org.uk/blog-birkhead-guillemot-eggs>)



The Razorbills (left), close relatives of the Guillemots, nest in less dense colonies and have normal-shaped eggs.

The ledge in the picture overleaf is occupied by a Razorbill, unphased by a temporary stopover by three puffins, while Kittiwakes nest nearby.

The Puffins find the clifftop grassy slopes perfect for their burrows.





We watched a family of Stonechats feeding: these chicks were waiting for their mother.

The Kestrel below was eating its catch of a vole from the cliff top.

It's always lovely to watch Fulmars glide elegantly past (overleaf).

The crumbling cliff top (overleaf) is a precarious place for these Bird's Foot Trefoils which will soon fall into the sea.





John Coish spotted Buff-tailed Bumblebees circling a hole, probably an abandoned rodent nest, where they nest in colonies of upwards of a hundred bees. The queen produces foraging workers first then males and new queens later in the season.

Below: foraging from a Buttercup





Above: Bird's-foot Trefoil is a nectar food plant for Red-tailed Bumblebees like this worker above, and also the main food plant for the caterpillars of Common Blue butterflies.



This looks like a Buffish Mining Bee nectaring on Hoary Cress. These are solitary mining bees which, unlike Bumblebees, nest in colonies but singly, each excavating a tunnel into which they lay their eggs.

Below right is a Northern Marsh Orchid, and below left a Meadow Pipit, perching on a fence post.



Bird List

Kestrel

Stonechat

Linnet

Jackdaw

Gannet

Guillemot

Razorbill

Puffin

Kittiwake

Herring gull

Cormorant

Shag

Herring gull

Fulmar

Meadow pipit

Skylark

Wood pigeon

List by John Kitson



Right: Sea Thrift
on the cliffs
and Sea Mayweed
below

Report and pictures HK

