

# Twite Newsletter

Spring 2012  
Issue 5



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nature



Brian Sumner

## Welcome back!

Twite from the South Pennines fly back in spring from their wintering grounds on the east and south east coast of England – and the day they are first seen is a day of great excitement! This year, we had reports that the birds had started returning on Saturday 3rd March – 4 were seen at Fly Flatts and by Sunday there were 5 plus 7 at Deer Hill and a further 8 (all seemed to be male) towards Bacup. They are back a little earlier this year – last year they were first reported on 13th March.

## Volunteering Opportunities

What nicer way to spend the day than looking for wild flowers in hay meadows in glorious countryside, with the sun shining and the birds singing their hearts out above you? We are looking for volunteers to help us check the success of the reseedling we have been doing over the last couple of years to help food supplies for the Twite. We need help between May and August for one day a month. Full training will be given to hone your ID skills and you will visit allocated fields on specific farms to carry out wild flower surveys. You'll either be working on your own or in small groups.

Interested? Then please get in touch with  
**Kerry Gowthorpe** [Kerry.gowthorpe@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Kerry.gowthorpe@rspb.org.uk)  
or phone 01484 868431.

## Project Progress - how it's all going

Kerry Gowthorpe and Jenny Oldroyd, Twite Recovery Project Officers, bring us up to speed with the progress of the Project:

### Twite on TV!

We were thrilled to be invited to appear on BBC's Countryfile on 15th April to talk about the Twite Recovery Project. Filming took place on a glorious day which showed off the South Pennines beautifully. Farmer Rachel Hallos was interviewed as well as RSPB's Charlotte Weightman. We just hope the Twite were watching!

We have achieved the target of ensuring that at least 10 ha of land close to 10 of the colonies are now in HLS with Twite management options, over half of which have between 40 to 60 ha within each Twite zone. This means that these parcels of land close to the moorland edge will remain as hay meadows – invaluable food sources for Twite and other wildlife – for the next 10 years from the start of each individual agri-environment agreement. This has only been possible through the interest and enthusiasm of local landowners and farmers, and the determined work of Natural England.

These hay meadows don't just deliver the critical food source for Twite, but many more species benefit too, such as the Bilberry Bumblebee and a whole suite of other native butterflies including the Small Heath, plus many more invertebrates.

When we find a meadow with good soils and a sympathetic landowner we sometimes add not only our Twite's favourite food sources but also a full complement of suitable native species, such as Black Knapweed, Eyebright and Selfheal, and so helping some of these meadows on their way to becoming species rich meadows – ideal for the connoisseur Twite with gourmet tastes!

Now we are looking at land around a further 8 colonies, half of which are either in or near Kirklees, which may be transformed into hay meadows so that the birds have food near where they nest. We are also formally adding 4 new (although some are probably relocated) colonies at Soyland Moor, Warm Withens, Hoar Edge and Fulshaw Clough to the Twite target area to make sure no bird misses out!

## Here are some headline facts and figures about the project.

- Overall number of holdings in agreement (or in the process) within the South Pennines Twite study area: 38
- Overall area covered by agreements (HLS & ELS): 2154 ha (7% of total) (826 fields)
- Overall number of fields in HLS: 181. These figures include all HLS fields, those for Twite and those for waders, which on some holdings may be over half the fields
- Overall area in HLS agreements for hay meadow management options in project area: 98 ha.
- Overall area reseeded to create new Twite habitat: 74.11 ha since 2010
- Total area managed specifically for Twite feeding: 172 ha. (0.5% of total).

To achieve an increase in Twite numbers we believe that more hay meadows will need to be created. The Project has made great strides towards achieving its targets (10ha over two fields per colony) by 2013. However there is still plenty to do and to truly achieve and increase Twite numbers up to 150 pairs, many more hay meadows will be needed.



## Update from the Watershed

The increasing use of the uplands for recreation means that the landscape is naturally at higher risk of erosion caused by human traffic, particularly around well used routes such as the Pennine Way. In addition, changes in UK legislation have meant that parts of the uplands have been made more accessible for people to enjoy. The designation of these areas of 'open access' land means that you can enjoy miles of spectacular moorland on foot.

This offers a great opportunity to see the landscape, but can have a detrimental effect on wildlife and habitats particularly ground nesting birds who can easily be disturbed by walkers.

A detailed study which took place around the last major re-surfacing of the Pennine Way in 1994 found that better footpaths encouraged people to stick to the path and therefore had a direct and positive impact on the habits of ground nesting birds in the area. This year the Watershed Landscape project has helped to support some more, much needed, improvements on this important national trail.

Above the village of Heptonstall, Calderdale Council have been resurfacing parts of the Pennine Way by laying of causey paving (reclaimed stone slabs) which effectively narrow the path, and therefore the corridor of possible erosion and disturbance, and raise the walkway above the peat so that the layers underneath are protected. Once the paving is established, heather and other species will grow around and up through cracks in the paving. This type of paving also benefits small mammals on the moors who can safely find routes under and between the slabs. Of course, less muddy and soggy feet will be felt by those walking the routes too! Similar work has also taken place on Ilkley Moor where helicopters have been used to get the stone into place. To find out more about all the work taking place as part of the Watershed Landscape project visit the website: [www.watershedlandscape.co.uk](http://www.watershedlandscape.co.uk)

The Twite Recovery Project is one of the partners in the Watershed Landscape Project - a 3 year programme, managed by Pennine Prospects, to enhance and conserve the South Pennines landscape and its heritage, whilst improving access for all.

### Competition news

The winner of the Autumn 2011 competition was

**Yvonne Davis**

of Hebden Bridge.

Many congratulations, Yvonne!

### Thank you!

Many thanks for all the photos, snippets of information and suggestions for the newsletter that you send in to us – please keep sending them in to us (contact details on the back page) – we may not be able to use all of them, but we'll try!

### Phrase book for Twite

So much for

'Where is the Post Office?' or 'I have lost my luggage' in a foreign phrase book – how about these words for Twite in other languages?

**French** : Linotte à bec jaune (translated as a linnet with a yellow beak)

**Norwegian** : Bergirisk

**Spanish**: Pardillo piquigualdo (the first word means a little brown bird, or linnet; the second refers to the yellow bill)

**Italian** : Fanello nordico and our favourite.....

**Dutch** : Frater

(the monks in Holland wore brown cassocks which must have reminded people of the brown feathers of the Twite)

**And around this country:**

**Scotland** : Muir Lintie (Muir is the Scots word for moorland)

**Yorkshire** : Moorfinch

And the wonderful

**Yellow-necked Lintie**

(on Tyneside someone who is quick is called a lintie)

Do let us know if you know any more!

Thanks to South Pennines LEADER funding, we ran two training events for volunteers early in 2012 to get people up to speed for the monitoring and surveying work to be done this spring and summer.



## Back to the Classroom

### Stuart Hedley, botanist and trainer, ran a botanical training course for Twite Project volunteers and said:

'It was with some trepidation that I responded to calls for help from the RSPB and travelled down to Ripponden on February 24th. Great to be asked to assist the Twite Recovery Project through helping volunteer surveyors with their botany field skills, certainly. But would there be anything to see at 300m in the Pennines in February? Happily, this winter had not blanketed the entire country in snow and there was even some weak sunshine and a curlew's warbling call, as it sailed in to join us as we were finishing our sandwiches that Friday.

And perennial plants - which account for the bulk of hay meadows - very often have some leaves visible in winter. After a morning session indoors training people to develop the keen and critical eyes of the field botanist, we quickly showed that an area which at first looks devoid of anything but grass will usually yield up a longish list, if you get down on your hands and knees to search. On Rachel and Stephen Hallos's holding at Ripponden we found an abundance of young sorrel rosettes, and occasional dandelion. Two sorts of buttercup and two sorts of clover also,

demonstrating their characteristic features, albeit in miniature. Cat's-ear, pignut and woodrush spotted the freer-draining banks and tiny plants of autumn hawkbit were just starting to develop their typical shape. A dozen others were present too. Field corners had good stands of annual meadow-grass, blinks and chickweed. Not the most beautiful of vegetation perhaps, but a banquet in the making for the Twite, yet to arrive, who would need to get into good condition to breed.

And I certainly hadn't bargained on the wonderful enthusiasm of the Twite Team and the volunteers. As we closed the day practising a sampling technique with which to assess the progress of the HLS re-seeding option, I looked up to see the volunteers' groups bent closely over the sward in rapt scrutiny. I only hope they don't adopt the downcast eyes of the botanist too completely, or the Twite will arrive unnoticed this year!

If you'd like to see the type of work which Stuart gets involved with, go to: [www.stuarthedley.co.uk](http://www.stuarthedley.co.uk). We used The Turnpike Inn, just minutes off Exit 22 off the M62 on Rishworth Moor, as the venue for the classroom side of the course – and they looked after us very well indeed!

## cont..... Back to the Classroom

**That's what Stuart said.....but let's hear it also from one of the delegates on the course! Richard Parker, a new volunteer, said:**

'After packing in my job as Company Director of a Halifax-based Web Design Company at the end of January to forge a new career path in conservation, I was looking to expand my knowledge and skills by volunteering for a variety of projects. One of them was to be a field surveyor for the Twite Project. I confessed immediately to having very little knowledge on a birding front, plant spotting front and general surveying front. So I was a little nervous and excited about the Twite training. I needn't have been - the existing volunteers, the Twite Team and Stuart (the botanist) were brilliant; it really didn't matter that I had no experience.

The morning session was a mix of practical tasks and slides on the various Twite friendly plants with plenty of audience involvement. Towards the end it was a

bit brain frazzling taking on so much information but I knew lunch and spending the afternoon outside was to follow.

The afternoon session was spent in a handful of meadows owned by a landowner signed up for the project. My ignorance over what was underfoot was almost criminal. I honestly couldn't believe the number of plants that were found within a square metre or two under Stuart's guidance. We were split into groups of two and tasked to survey a meadow that had been reseeded last autumn. By the end of the survey session I think I picked up more knowledge than I ever dreamed of. It was absolutely fascinating and I can't wait to get the surveys going over the summer and I'll try and keep my eye in until then.'

**The farmers whose land we looked at on the training session, Rachel and Stephen Hallos, had this to say about the project as they also help by storing seed deliveries in the late summer:**

'Being the host of "Seed Central" in our yard we have witnessed the huge amount of work that goes on before the seed even gets to the field. Deliveries are received on behalf of the RSPB whereupon Charlotte and her band of happy volunteers spend hours individually weighing quantities of different seeds

appropriate to each field being sown in the South Pennines. It has opened our eyes to what a labour of love the Twite Project has become, and why it is so rewarding to those involved when those tiny shoots slowly poke their way through the soil!'



## cont.... Back to the Classroom

The second training day was a trip to Heysham in Lancashire to see Twite from Scotland on their wintering grounds. Tim Melling, Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB wrote:



'On Saturday 25th February a small group of Twite enthusiasts drove up to Heysham on the Lancashire coast in the hope of getting up close and personal with Twite as part of the training offered to volunteers. The shadow of a nuclear power station might not seem the most appropriate of birdwatching sites but a few dozen Twite have made this their winter home for several years now, irresistibly drawn to a small sheltered bank full weeds and seeds.

Alan Draper and Pete Marsh, both self-employed ornithological contractors and licensed ringers and who carry out monitoring etc on behalf of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, greeted our arrival, explaining that 47 Twite had been here ten minutes ago, but had since flown off. Our anxious wait was only for a few minutes and we soon heard the distinctive "zway-eet" calls and saw the bouncing silhouettes of an arriving flock. They lined up obligingly on a barbed wire fence and we counted 53, all Twite, and not a Linnet in sight! We then retired to a classroom, courtesy of Lancashire Wildlife Trust, at nearby Heysham nature reserve to allow the ringers the necessary peace and quiet to try and catch a few Twite. Pete explained that most of these Twite visit from their breeding grounds on the west coast of Scotland, with very few coming from the nearby Pennines. For some

inexplicable reason, the Pennine Twite all travel to the east coast, which is much further than the short flight to Heysham.

After about 15 minutes, Pete's mobile phone went off with the good news that they had caught 18 Twite in a "whoosh" net, so we dashed back down. Alan, a trained and licensed bird ringer weighed, measured and ringed each Twite before releasing them. Some of them had been caught and ringed previously by Alan at Heysham, but one bird had been ringed in northern Scotland a couple of years previously. He showed us how they knew the sex and age of each bird, by the pink on the rump and the shape of the tail feathers. The birds seemed reasonably relaxed by this process as they sang and twittered to each other while they were "stored" in soft cotton bags. There were a number of other interesting birds nearby, including two Mediterranean Gulls that repeatedly flew past us.

After our wonderful Twite experience we had time for a short visit to Leighton Moss where we saw Pintail, Little Egrets, Spotted Redshanks, Marsh Harriers and even a Glossy Ibis, a lost wanderer from southern Europe. We could not have hoped for a more successful day.'

## Twite Inspires

Sue Gilbert, who read Char March's book of poetry entitled 'The Cloud Appreciation Society's Day Out' wrote to say, 'My absolute favourite has to be the poem The A to Z of Twite. Even my father, John Sinclair Gilbert, who was an ardent birdwatcher before 'twitcher' was invented, never saw a Twite. I know because I have his old field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe, with a checklist. He's ticked most of them, but not the Twite. He was an army medic for years and spotted birds all over North Africa, Arden, Yemen, the Gulf States and random bits of Europe. He would have been delighted to be associated with the Twite Recovery Project.'

Tim Melling

# Sailing, Not Flying!

At the RSPB we get sent dozens of photos of LBJs (little brown jobs) which 9 times out of 10 turn out to be either moulting house sparrows or Reed buntings. But recently we were sent a genuine Twite photo, the first in 7 years, taken in 2010. Admittedly said bird was on a ship on the North Sea, perhaps hitching a lift, as it looked so exhausted. Let's hope it recovered on its cruise, and arrived feeling refreshed and ready for anything!



Pictures by Leila Gray, age 9 and Esme Turner, just 5 years old

## Family History Corner - The Twites

We were delighted to hear from Mr Twite who drove over from his home in Ilkley last winter to the Hebden Bridge Canal and Visitor Centre to buy bottles of Light Twite Ale – the perfect Christmas present for his son in Manchester! Laurence Twite told us about his family – it's remarkable that his family does share certain similarities with the little bird!

'My family, both close and remote, are far spread. I originate from Norfolk and there are a few distant relatives living in East Anglia. My son lives in Manchester with his wife and two daughters but works in Westminster. My other daughter lives in Richmond, Surrey and again has a daughter so our family name is becoming as rare as the bird!

Although I am not a bird watcher, I do know that the Twite winters in Norfolk and eats Samphire seeds. During the war, we too ate Samphire which I understand is very rich in iron. There was a weekly delivery to the village by horse and cart – very fresh as it was picked on the saltmarshes of the nearby Wash.'

*Incidentally, the bottles of Light Twite Ale flew off the shelves within weeks.*



## RSPB iPhone Apps

For those of you that have iPhones we're pleased to report that the first RSPB iPhone apps are now available from the App Store. This is an exciting first step into the world of apps for the RSPB and we hope these are the first of many.

Please note: The apps are not available on android.

### loveBirds :

[http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/lovebirds/id477109412?ls=1&mt=8:](http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/lovebirds/id477109412?ls=1&mt=8)

Download price: £4.99 - the RSPB receives a royalty of £1.45 per download.

This is a stimulating and easy-to-use guide to the UK's fantastic bird life.

### loveNature :

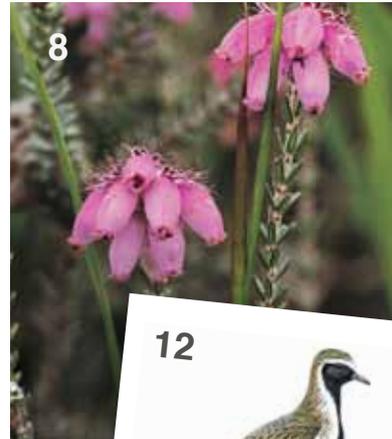
[http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/lovenature/id477110092?ls=1&mt=8 :](http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/lovenature/id477110092?ls=1&mt=8)

This app is **free** to download – royalties are not payable.

A showcase of RSPB nature reserves with lots of information on their habitats and wonderful wildlife. The app will inspire users and help them plan visits, as well as taking advantage of its fun and useful features.

# Know Your Moorland Habitat Quiz

How well do you know our South Pennines moorland habitat? Can you identify all of these?  
Answers on Page 10



**Photo credits :** Images 1,2, 6, 9, 10, 11 and 16 Tim Melling. Images 3,13,5 12, 15 Mike Langman (rspb-images.com). Image 14 Robert Melling, age 15. Images 4 and 8 Andy Hay (rspb-images.com). Image 7 Ben Hall (rspb-images.com).

# Changes on Team Twite

After 2 years leading the Twite Recovery Project team, Tim Melling is handing over the reins to Nick Adams. This is to allow Tim more time to focus on protecting important bird sites from damaging developments, which has always been his main job. However, although he's handing over the project management, he will still be part of the team, keeping the project on the rails with his incredible bird and wildlife knowledge.

We would like to welcome Nick Adams and hope that he enjoys working to improve the fortunes of the little Twite. We caught up with Nick just days after he started on the Project. ***We couldn't take a photo of Nick - he was out of the door looking for Twite as soon as the interview was over! Maybe next time!***

## **What have you been working on recently?**

I've been on secondment to the Northern Region as Area Conservation Manager, and I've recently been appointed permanently in that role. As a team we've been working on a wide range of projects including species protection work and upland management advice. My role before that was as Wessex Stone-curlew Project Manager, based in Salisbury.

## **Have you always worked for the RSPB?**

No, in my previous life I was an accountant for 17 years. Eventually the voluntary conservation work I was doing started to get in the way of my accounting career and I was lucky enough to be headhunted for a role monitoring the survival rate of curlew buntings reared and released to see if a project to set up a separate population in Cornwall was feasible. I also worked on a Stone-curlew project on the Wessex Downs (chalk downland in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire) – a project similar in many ways to

the Twite Project, where we worked very closely with farmers and landowners to provide safe breeding sites for the birds. Without the farmers and landowners taking the Stone-curlew to their hearts and making space for the birds on their land and in their crops, the project would never have got off the ground. The number of breeding pairs in Wessex has increased from c.30 in the mid 1980s to in excess of 140 in 2011. Although the birds have increased, the bulk of the population has confined itself to a few core areas, some of which seemed to be bursting at the seams. So it was a truly magical moment in 2010 to watch a Stone-curlew slowly walk up to sit on its nest on the Marlborough Downs. This was the first confirmed breeding attempt that we were aware of in 34 years on this huge area of chalk downland. I look forward to bringing this experience of saving endangered species to the Twite Recovery Project.

## **What do you do in your spare time?**

I'm a big Rugby Union fan and have started watching Newcastle Falcons, but now I'm working in League country, so I'm keen to make it to a game or two now the new season has started. A bit of a busman's holiday, but I like birding around Northern England, and I'm especially looking forward to getting to know the uplands. Other than that I enjoy observing other wildlife such as moths, butterflies and dragonflies. And I have to confess there is nothing to beat the odd pint down the pub after a long day!

# Twite Sightings and Re-Sightings



**Our South Pennine Twite fly to the east and south east coast of England in the winter, searching for food. Sightings over the winter included:**

**40+ twite reported on the 28th January at Frampton Marsh, Lincolnshire**

Flocks of Twite searching for seeds around the brackish pools in Dingle Marshes between the shingle and the reeds.

**We've also been sent these details of re-sightings in 2011.**

Kevin Lister saw a total of 13 different birds in one spot in the north west of the South Pennines, namely:

**4 from Blackstone Edge (2 ringed in 2009, 2 in 2010)**

**2 from Chelburn Moor ringed in 2010**

**3 from Langfield Common ringed in 2010**

**2 from Whitworth Quarry ringed in 2010**

**And 2 adults that were ringed in spring 2009**

Nick Wilkinson, RSPB Conservation Scientist, has sent in these re-sightings from volunteers:

**1 from Cupwith ringed in 2010 seen at Deer Hill in April 2011**

**2 from Blackstone Edge ringed in 2010 seen at Fly Flatts and Rishworth**

**1 from Chelburn ringed in 2010 seen at Teesmouth (mid-way between Hartlepool and Redcar) in October**

**3 from Fly Flatts – 2 ringed in 2010 seen locally and 1 from 2009 seen in Kent in October 2011.**

And lastly, one of the adults ringed by Sean Gray in spring 2009 was found in April 2011 in a raptor nest at Horton-in-Ribblesdale in North Yorkshire, so who knows where it was going to breed!

## Answers to the Moorland Habitat Quiz

**Answers:**

1. Bilberry Bumblebee
2. Common Cotton Grass
3. Skylark
4. Heather (also called Ling)
5. Meadow Pipit
6. Mountain Hare
7. Small Heath Butterfly
8. Cross-leaved Heath
9. Bilberry
10. Green Hairstreak Butterfly
11. Emperor Moth
12. Golden Plover
13. Merlin
14. Common Lizard
15. Twite
16. Bog Asphodel

## How did you do?

**Scores 15 +**

You must be David Attenborough!

**Scores 8 to 14**

Very good, we're impressed

**Scores under 8**

Just a session with a few ID books and you'll soon be up there at the top!

# Contact Us at the RSPB

Westleigh Mews, Wakefield Road, Denby Dale, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD8 8QD. Tel: **01484 861148** [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

**Kerry Gowthorpe, TRP Officer (Wed, Thurs) : 07734 985957 [kerry.gowthorpe@rspb.org.uk](mailto:kerry.gowthorpe@rspb.org.uk)**

**Jenny Oldroyd, TRP Officer (Wed, Thurs, Fri) : 07841 317034 [jenny.oldroyd@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jenny.oldroyd@rspb.org.uk)**

**Charlotte Weightman, Habitat Intervention Officer : 07702 960895 [charlotte.weightman@rspb.org.uk](mailto:charlotte.weightman@rspb.org.uk)**

**Nick Adams, Area Conservation Manager: 07843 291052 [nick.adams@rspb.org.uk](mailto:nick.adams@rspb.org.uk)**

**Tim Melling, Senior Conservation Officer : 01484 868423 [tim.melling@rspb.org.uk](mailto:tim.melling@rspb.org.uk)**

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