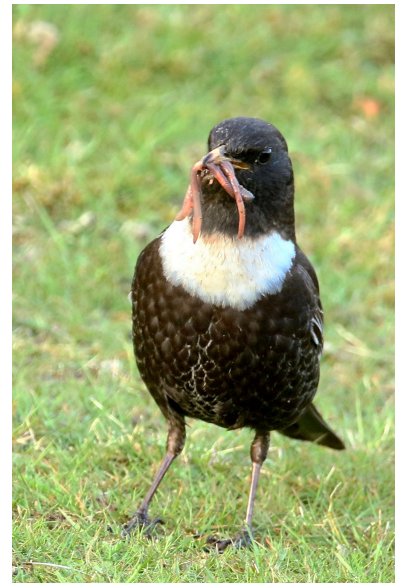


## U3A BIRDWATCHING GROUP REPORT by Andrew Lapworth

### Upper Teesdale: Widdy Bank Farm Monday 15th May 2023 and Black Grouse Lek on Thursday 18th May

On a rather cool (but thankfully dry) day 7 of us met on the road to Cow Green reservoir from Langdon Beck for our walk out to Widdy Bank Farm and back. Enroute we enjoyed great views of the breeding waders, namely Lapwings (many had fairly grown-up chicks), Curlews, giving their evocative bubbling songs and calls, noisy Oystercatchers and at least one rather distant drumming Snipe; we also disturbed two Snipe at close range in the ditches. All the way we had good views of singing Skylarks, comparing their appearances to the more numerous Meadow Pipits. We noticed smart Wheatears, but what really caught our eyes were the hundreds (thousands?) of beautiful pink Bird's Eye Primroses, scattered all along the track and spread across the meadows as far as the eye could see.

We passed through the herd of Belted Galloways, admiring their cute new-born calves, and as we approached the farmyard we began scanning for our target special bird: the Ring Ouzel or Mountain Blackbird. We didn't have any luck as we approached the farmyard but lingered there, scanning the dry stone walls and rickety fence lines. Two Pennine Way walkers far ahead of us disturbed what looked like a pair of Ring Ouzels as they went through the stile, but we couldn't relocate them. We found a sheltered spot to have our elevenses on the banks of the Tees and spotted Pied Wagtails and Common Sandpipers; Wrens were singing loudly and could be heard over the sound of the river.



We went to make our return walk but were stopped in our tracks when we suddenly spotted two Ring Ouzels gathering earth worms in the field behind the farm; they were distant, but we watched them fly across the Tees and up to the boulder-strewn slopes of Cronkley Fell, no doubt to their nest. Pleased to have found these elusive birds we went back through the farm, only to enjoy a brief but really good view of a fine cock bird, showing his bright white chest crescent.

When we returned to our cars we decided to drive along "Snipe Alley" to see if we could see some waders perched along the lane: nothing! A House Sparrow was added to the morning's list. We ended our morning being shown a convenient site to see Spring Gentians (thank you Linda and John); we saw the site but alas, no Gentians were visible.

## Langdon Beck Black Grouse Lek Thursday May 18th May 2023

***“Males with their chests puffed out, their tails spread to make themselves look as big as possible, making the loudest noises they can, irresistibly remind me of the bar of an Australian pub near closing time”. (Natalie Bennett, Red Sixty Seven. BTO: 2020)***

I picked up just two group members, Jim and Judith, for a pre-breakfast trip up to Langdon Beck to see the spectacle of the lek (display ground) of Black Grouse. We arrived there at just after 0500 on a fine, still morning and parked to view the lek from the car. Winding the windows down we enjoyed the magical bubbling sound of the 21 or 22 male birds, with their occasional raucous calls. At first the lek was fairly quiet, but when several females turned-up, the males became excited and began displaying and fighting with each other. A wonderful wildlife spectacle we are still fortunate to be able to enjoy here in Teesdale.