

### u3a BIRDWATCHING GROUP

#### March field trip: the River Tees in Barnard Castle Report and photos by Andrew Lapworth

Twelve members of the group met at the Green bridge in Thorngate on 16th March for a slow and leisurely morning walk along the Tees, from the bridge to the fields beyond “MacDonald’s farm” and back. It was a little drizzly with a moderate but gusty wind. Most of us managed to have good views from the bridge of a pair of Goosanders preening on the riverside; noisy Oystercatchers flew over accompanied by Pied Wagtails, the usual Jackdaws and Black-headed Gulls. A Song Thrush sang from the Startforth bank as we walked by the river on the Demesnes, and we quickly saw and heard Robin, Great, Blue and Coal Tits plus Chaffinches and Blackbirds.

As we approached the falls we recognised Curlew song before realising it was a close Common Starling doing a really good mimic! A Mistle Thrush sang into the wind from a distant treetop.

Along the river we looked in vain for Kingfishers, Dippers and Grey Wagtails: all birds we’d expect to see along here (Roger later did get a glimpse of a Grey Wagtail but we failed to relocate it). However we enjoyed a good view of a **Cormorant** as it preened itself on a boulder in the river: superficially an all-black bird, but on close views in our binoculars and good light we could appreciate its oily, scaly green colouration.



*A Cormorant in breeding plumage, worth a close look.*

Our disappointment at not seeing the 3 riverine birds was more than made up by us all having close, eye-level and prolonged views of **Wrens**, Treecreepers, Nuthatches and Long-tailed Tits as they worked the bankside trees (I even managed to video the Wren for 1min 18 seconds). We noted that Treecreepers climb up the trunks before flying down to the next tree in contrast to

the Nuthatches which went headfirst down the trunks. En route we also heard one of the earliest Spring migrants: Chiffchaffs singing their name; eventually we all had good views of one, again, at eye-level. A total of 25 species were seen during our short visit.

