

The newsletter of the _____



Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust



No. 67 Summer 2006

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Firstly thank you to everyone, particularly Bidy Gray, who rallied round while I was enjoying a visit to Australia in the autumn. I had a great time with some wonderful sightings including the spring flowers in Western Australia, especially Royal Hakea and Quaalup Bell, and the quiet early morning in Queensland spent watching two Duck-billed Platypuses feeding in a large river pool.

Back to reality and a plea for help/support for two events in June, unfortunately on the same date, Saturday 10th. We need help on the stand at the Dalgety Bay Gala (contact Stephanie Thrower 01333 312 631) and at the coffee morning in St Andrews (contact me on 01334 475763). For the latter, please look out items for the tombola and other stalls (details on back page), sell some tickets - available from committee members - and come along to raise some funds.

Steve Blow, our Conservation Manager, left this area at the end of March although he will still be working for the SWT further

west. Steve has put in a lot of hard work in Fife and we shall miss his cheerful presence. I should like to thank him for all his efforts and wish him well in his new area. I welcome Drew Jones as our new Reserves Manager and look forward to working with him.

If you would like to go on our e-mail list for reminders of meetings and items of SWT news, please e-mail me at jeanstewart18@aol.com.

The National AGM and Members Day will be held on our patch this year, at the Gateway Centre, St Andrews on Saturday 30 September. We shall need some help on the day with stewarding etc. Please let me know if you will be available. The programme for the day is very interesting and I look forward to seeing you there.

Jean Stewart

HAVE YOU SEEN A THORN-APPLE?

In early October 2005 Jill Maillie of Giffordtown near Ladybank brought me a fine fruiting specimen of a Thorn-apple that has appeared in her 'new' garden, which until recently had belonged to old cottages demolished quite some time ago. It kept well until 5th November, so I took it, still in its pot, to the joint Botanical Societies' Scottish annual meeting in Perth, labelled as *Datura stramonium*. Here it excited a lot of curiosity, as it is very rare in Scotland - and also caught the attention of one or two botanists from south of the border who mentioned that they thought it was rather *D. ferox*, a close relative but unknown north of Yorkshire, where it had been found as a wool-shoddy alien. I knew neither, at least in fruit, but interestingly, Jill recalled that at the Society's lecture on 1st November on "Home Grown Poisons", the lecturer had shown a slide of *D. stramonium* which she thought looked a bit different from her plant. I gave the specimen to the RBG Edinburgh representative present at Perth, and a couple of days later he phoned to say that the spines on the plant's fruits (the "apples") came within the measurements of *D. ferox*: a new record for Scotland.

However, after checking various descriptions and photographs of the two species, I wasn't convinced, so I sent my own photos of the plant to Eric Clement, an authority on British aliens. His opinion was that it fitted neither species exactly and although close to *D. ferox*, it might well be the hybrid between the two. This suggestion seemed to resolve the doubts I'd had but I was then recommended to send the details to Julian Shaw, a *Datura* expert. His verdict was that the Thorn-apple was in fact *D. ferox*. It is evidently quite variable - and indeed in turn may well be merely a variety of *D. quercifolia*, a species from central America. There is obviously much debate as to just what is what in the genus! How the Thorn-apple got to Giffordtown is a puzzle. A probable answer is that it came in with poultry food, as hens were

kept on the site years ago, and the seed could have lain dormant until the recent excavations.

As there is only one other confirmed record of a Thorn-apple from Fife (actually in 2004, on an old rubbish coup), I am keen to find out if it might have appeared in other gardens. Perhaps anyone who has come across this distinctive - and of course highly poisonous - plant with its (usually) white "angel's-trumpet" flowers (they are close relations of the *Brugmansias*) and "apple" fruits covered in spines (very stout and fierce indeed in *D.ferox*) could get in touch with me (in my capacity as Botanical Recorder for Fife & Kinross), at 193 Nicol Street, Kirkcaldy, KY1 1PF (01592-263135).

George Ballantyne

WELCOME to the many new members who have joined, or moved into the area, during the last few months. We hope many of you will enjoy playing an active part in our activities, but even if that is not possible your support is greatly appreciated.

THE NATURE OF FIFE INVENTORY

The "Nature of Fife" Inventory, i.e. the annotated list of all species recorded in Fife that was initially compiled to accompany the book, has begun to appear on the Fife Council website www.fifedirect.org.uk. The first batch appeared at the beginning of February and further batches will be added when they have been updated and refereed.

Gordon Corbet

BUTTERFLIES IN FIFE

Butterflies are perhaps the best recorded insect species in the UK and records go back to the 18th century. They are recognised as a sensitive indicator of environmental quality and several comparative surveys have been carried out over the past decades, the last being the Millennium Study. The summary of results indicates a general decline in numbers (loss of habitat) and an increase in Northern range (? climate warming). Indeed, in 2004, the Comma was recorded in 3 sites in Fife, the first time for over a hundred years.

Butterflies can be grouped as the “Get up and Go” types which may be resident (e.g. Large White) or migrant (e.g. Clouded Yellow) and the resident “Local Stay at Home” types (e.g. Pearl Bordered Fritillary). The variable migrant counts depend on favourable winds from Europe and a good breeding season – 1996 was an outstanding year for the Painted Lady. It is the resident colonies of the “Stay at home” types that are at greatest risk of decline principally due to habitat loss or adverse weather. Also, colonies are separated by inhospitable land – there are no “friendly corridors” to join them e.g. woodland rides, uncontaminated hedgerows. Butterfly survival depends on larval food plants, nectar sources, good weather and a stable habitat. If any of these are disrupted then it may take years for the population to recover.

Fife has a fair variety of species to enjoy so where do you look? On a warm spring day the new brood of Orange Tips appears. This butterfly, rare in Fife until 30 years ago, has adapted to using Garlic Mustard as a food plant (usual food plant is Lady's Smock). I have seen large colonies along the banks of the river

Eden below Nydie Mill. Apart from over wintered Small Tortoiseshell and Peacocks and new broods of Whites one has to wait until end of June/July for more species and a visit to Tentsmuir Forest can be rewarding. Dark Green Fritillary, Common Blue, Ringlelet, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Small Copper and Green Hairstreaks can all be seen. In August Graylings are on the wing. The Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary is locally frequent in Fife and I have seen them at Auchtermuchty Common in July. Come August, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and Painted Ladies abound (the latter two are migrants). Any rough ground e.g. dunes, old quarries, railway embankments with thistles, buddleia escapes are places to look for. Try a trip to Kincaig, Elie to see Northern Brown Argus, which feeds on Common Rock-rose. In September, Red Admirals get drunk on fermenting fallen apples and it's a good time to get the camera out.

There are other butterflies that should be in Fife. The Speckled Wood is common in England and Morayshire. It was almost extinct in UK in late 18th century but has expanded rapidly since 1920. The Purple Hairstreak lives on oak trees high in their canopy and is probably under recorded. If the climate gets warmer over the years then we may see Walls, Holly Blues, White Letter Hairstreaks and more Commas; they're only a short hop away in Northumberland. Above all, we should grow butterfly friendly plants in our garden, as they are the nectar “fuel stations” for their journey. And what about Butterfly photography? – Well, that may be the subject of another article.

Jamie Lyall

A ROOM WITH A VIEW—AND A BABY

I've just read June Johnson's article in FAWN about wildlife in her garden. I too have been unable to make recent SWT outings, though I hope to bring our new son Andrew to meetings before too long.

Meanwhile, we've been enjoying the birds of the Eden estuary from our living room window. At low tide, except during very hard freezing conditions, the wintering flock of golden plovers brightens up the mud-flats. As the tide comes in, the black-tailed godwit flock (the largest in Scotland), and on good days a few greenshanks, are among the waders congregating along the edge of the salt-marsh, or joining the grazing wigeon on the grass. Any may be prey for the peregrine which winters on Guardbridge paper mill. Drifting up-river on the tide may come great crested or Slavonian grebes, red-throated divers, or my favourite, long-tailed ducks. In my south-of-England childhood, goldeneye were relative rarities. Now, I can watch them daily, head-tossing in comical display. The commonest mammals are probably common seals, but we also see roe deer, and once watched a local fox swimming the river at low tide.

Closer to the house, we have more usual garden birds, including a regular great spotted woodpecker. Large numbers of

greenfinches and chaffinches, as well as wood pigeons, account for our frequent orders of seed from ranger Les Hatton. This also attracts yellowhammers, tree sparrows, and sometimes bramblings. All these, most duck and many of the waders, of course, leave us in the summer, but new highlights arrive. Several species of tern and little gulls join the larger residents of the river. So far we have few warblers on our garden list, but one of the joys of birding is that you never know what will turn up next.

Andrew has proved a good birding mascot, at home and further afield. He has slept through visits to such exciting Scottish vagrants as paddyfield warbler and isabelline shrike. At home, this winter's highlights were undoubtedly a snow goose, which joined the regular greylag flock for about six weeks, and a long-eared owl. This was perhaps our most surprising sighting to date, as it simply sat on the mud-flats through a whole day of neap tides. Previous summers' highlights have included a group of avocets and a little egret. With Andrew bringing us luck, what might next spring and summer bring?

Sue Armstrong

BRIC-A-BRAC AND BOOKS

David Waddell is happy to continue selling bric-a-brac and books at sales in aid of SWT. Not only does this raise money for the Trust, it also helps to recycle goods! Reasonable quality items are particularly welcome, so please search your attic or wardrobe. Contact Biddy Gray, Dorothy Macdonald, Jean Stewart, or your local committee member, or bring items to a meeting.

PLANT A TREE FOR A FRIEND

You can contribute to conservation in Fife, and at the same time give an unusual gift or memorial, by having a tree planted at one of our reserves. Minimum donation is £15 for the first tree and £10 for each subsequent tree; cost includes a commemorative certificate. Contact Alison Irvine, Tel: 01337 830366, e-mail: prosen@ukf.net

VISITING THE NEIGHBOURS—Members Centre events for the whole of Scotland are published in the current edition of “Scottish Wildlife”, so there is no longer a need for this item – *Ed*.

CONSERVATION MANAGER'S NOTES

I have often used these notes to update you all on what's happening on the reserves, but I am also involved in local planning issues and I'd like to mention an environmental disaster in the making. A proposal has been submitted to use Largo Bay as a location for the ship-to-ship transfer of heavy crude oil. The impact of oil spills on the internationally important bird populations that breed and over-winter round the Firth of Forth would be unthinkable. SWT are vigorously objecting to the plan going ahead. Last year I collected 10 dead birds, including eider, guillemot and a gannet, from the beach at Dumbarrie Links Wildlife Reserve following a minor oil spill in the Firth of Forth.

On the reserves, the Conservation teams have carried out felling and ditch damming on the south side of Bankhead Moss and they have also dug shallow scrapes to provide new pools and expand the coverage of sphagnum mosses. Thanks to the BTCV Green Gym from Lochore who have been snipping away at the birch regeneration on the bog this winter. They have also carried out some scrub clearance at Fleecefaulds Meadow, which will be lightly grazed by the Flying Flock this summer to help control coarse grasses and scrub regeneration. This will mean a few less flowers to see in the central compartment, but the southern compartment will be left ungrazed.

Applications for windfarms across Fife continue to appear in

my pigeon hole regularly. A number have been close to SWT designated wildlife sites and so I often submit comments on suitability, wildlife interest, etc... Everyone has their own thoughts on the aesthetic appeal, or not, of wind generators, but as an organisation, SWT supports the development of renewable energy, including wind energy as part of a coordinated approach to reduce our reliance on non-sustainable and polluting fossil fuels. However, we will not support developments in unsuitable locations that are likely to have an adverse impact on the habitats or on the wildlife using, or passing through the proposed site.

Sadly, this is my last 'note' as I will be moving jobs to cover the SWT reserves in South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway. I'd just like to say thank you to everyone I have met and worked with for making the last couple of years thoroughly enjoyable and I have really appreciated your support and enthusiasm. Drew Jones will be taking over and he will be the Reserve Manager covering Fife, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk. See the contact list for his details. The next few years will see SWT continue to develop the way it works, both on and off reserves and your help will be needed more than ever, so please get involved, you won't regret it!

Steve Blow

Editor's Note—Steve, your informative and lively contributions to FAWN have been much appreciated.

WINTER BIRDS AT MORTON OF PITMILLY

The outing to Morton of Pitmilly, by Kingsbarns, on 21st January produced a near-record turnout of 28 people. The reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that this farm is not well known, even to those who travel regularly along the St Andrews - Craig road, though some may have heard of the habitat creation and other wildlife-friendly work that has gone on there in the last few years, including tree-planting, the creation of set-aside strips and beetle-banks and the restoration of old hedgerows. Having so many people turn up does bring problems in ensuring that everyone sees everything but, in the course of a gentle morning ramble, we managed to see or hear a total of 26 species of bird. The bunting hunting was certainly successful with good views of

Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings perched and up to 25 Corn Buntings foraging in stubble (and even singing a little); finch-finding was less impressive but Chaffinches and Greenfinches were seen by all and a single Goldfinch by a sharp-eyed few. Linnets were conspicuous by their absence (at least near enough to identify!) Other highlights included a party of resting Golden Plover viewable by telescope from the rendezvous point, two parties of Pink-footed Geese and a few Lonely Lapwings passing overhead, a Buzzard following the plough and a Great Spotted Woodpecker calling though heard by only a few. The mammal highlight was a group of four Roe Deer watching us watching them!

Donald Stewart

BIODIVERSITY CO-ORDINATOR IS THE NAME — PARTNERSHIP IS THE GAME

Actually, Julie Horsburgh is the name and I have recently moved from Derbyshire where I was the Project Officer for a Countryside Management partnership project, to take up the Biodiversity Co-ordinator post with Fife Council. The Nature Conservation Act requires the Council to "further the conservation of biodiversity". I will encourage the Council to keep this end in view when making strategic decisions.

I also have a wider remit, helping deliver the natural heritage agenda of the Community Plan, delivered through the Take A Pride In Fife campaign. I will be developing the Fife Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), and providing a mechanism whereby specialist expertise and interested parties can come together to deliver action on the ground for the benefit of biodiversity across Fife.

This specialist expertise comes from the partners I work with, including Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Fife Ranger Service, Biological Recording in Scotland, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Scottish Water, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Elmwood College, Scottish Agricultural College business

unit and local groups such as Fife Bat Group and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club: in fact, a whole host of interested parties. The Partnership is always keen to involve any other organisations which may want to take part in biodiversity initiatives.

Practical delivery of such initiatives is the key objective of the group and current projects include work on habitat for water voles, nutrient budgeting schemes, protection of watercourses, farmland practices to benefit Corn Bunting and protection and management of valuable sites.

The LBAP is a key document in the delivery of action across Fife, giving a strategic view of where we should focus efforts. It identifies what is important, both nationally and locally, and how to achieve improvements in the status of habitats and species. The Partnership has started the development of a third edition of the Plan due this year, through working groups covering each of Urban, Rural and Coastal priorities. For further information contact me on 01592 413437.

Julie Horsburgh

SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST: FIFE AND KINROSS MEMBERS CENTRE

PROGRAMME FOR SUMMER 2006

Non-members are very welcome at all events

If you have suggestions for future meetings, or can offer to lead a walk or give a talk, please contact Jean Stewart, Members Centre Chairman, tel 01334 475763, e-mail JeanStewart18@aol.com

MAY

Outdoor meeting, a Visit to Dumbarrie Links

Sunday 28th May, meet Lower Car Park, East end of Lower Largo (NO 425 027), 13.30

Dr Gordon Corbet will lead a wildflower walk on the reserve. Contact Gordon Corbet 01333 340634

JUNE

Flowers on Auchtermuchty Common

Sunday 4 June, meet car park by entrance to north end of Common, on east side of B936 approx 1 mile N of Auchtermuchty (NO 238 135, 1400.

George Ballantyne, Kate Morison and Heather Winship will lead this walk to see the wild flowers on this outstanding botanical site. Contact Kate Morison 01337 828058

Wildlife Week: Outing to Den of Airlie

Saturday 10 June, meet at small car park by River Melgam (NO 299 527), 10.00

Dr Hugh Ingram will lead this joint outing with Angus & Dundee and North Angus MC to explore the spectrum of natural features at the confluence of the Rivers Melgam and Isla. NB rough walking involved, so stout boots essential. Approx 3 hours

Dalgety Bay Gala

Saturday 10 June, Dalgety Bay, all day.

As last year we shall be having a stall at the gala. Please contact Stephanie Thrower (01333 312 631) if you can offer help.

Coffee Morning

Saturday 10 June, Supper Room, Town Hall, St Andrews, 1000 to 1200

All contributions of books, plants, baking, produce, tombola prizes, bric-a-brac are welcome. Please come along to support one of our main fund-raising events and enjoy a pleasant chat over coffee. If you can provide baking or can help on the day, please contact Jean Stewart (01334 475763).

An orchid meadow in Kinross

Thursday 29 June, meet at the Meadow at 1900, off Aldie Road, 1 mile east of Powmill Milkbar on A977 (NT 034 985)

In recent years, 800 greater butterfly orchids have flowered in this meadow in the Keith Hills. Led by Tim Brain (contact 01577 840317).

JULY

Barnyards Marsh Reserve Open Afternoon and Tea in Kilconquhar Church Hall

Saturday 8 July, meet at reserve entrance near car park by Kinneuchar Inn, Kilconquhar (NO 484 021.), 1400 to 1600. The marsh is usually wet underfoot; wellies recommended.

Albert Lawrie, reserve convener, and others from the management committee will be on hand to point out the features of this reserve. The wild flowers should be at their best at this time of year. Kilconquhar Church will be selling teas all afternoon so we can go across the road for a cup of tea and home baking. Contact Albert Lawrie, 01333 330480

Bat Evening at Craigencait Ecology Centre

Thursday 27 July, meet at the Centre (NT 876 259) off B923 beside Kinghorn Loch at 20.30.

Come and discover some Fife Bats. Hear about these fascinating creatures and take a dusk walk to see them led by Richard Smith. (Contact Richard Smith 01592 741212).

AUGUST

Visit to Fleecefaulds Meadow, Ceres

Sunday 13 August, meet at the reserve carpark (NO 402 087), 1400

Alison Irvine, reserve convener, will lead a walk to look at the magnificent butterflies and other insects as well as the abundant wild flowers found at Fleecefaulds in late summer. Contact Alison Irvine (01337 830366).

SEPTEMBER

Fungal Foray

Saturday 9 September, Star Moss, meet at Village Hall, Star near Markinch, 1400.

Joint meeting with Fife Fungal Interest Group to look at the variety of fungi to be found in early autumn. Contact Tony Wilson (01334 473047)

National Members Day and AGM

Saturday 30 September, Gateway Centre, St Andrews, 1000 to 1600

Details of the programme and how to book will be in Scottish Wildlife. Do come along and support the local MC who will be helping to host this national event.

CONTACTS

Members Centre Website www.swt-fife.org.uk

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The pulp used in the manufacture of this paper is from renewable timber produced on a fully sustainable basis.