

The newsletter of the \_\_\_\_\_



# Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust



No. 68 Autumn/Winter 2006-2007

## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

As I write in June, we are in the midst of our summer programme of field visits and fund-raising events. The outing to Dumbarrie Links in May, a joint meeting with Kirkcaldy Naturalists' Society and the Pitcairn Society, attracted 46 people. An excellent afternoon was enjoyed by all as Gordon Corbet, in his inimitable way, demonstrated the range of animals and plants on the reserve. We enjoyed seeing the Purple Milk Vetch in flower and the masses of Cowslips and Primroses. It was also a pleasure to see participants of all ages enthusing over some of the lesser-known wee beasties.

As well as the arrival of Drew Jones as our new Reserve Manager there have been some changes to our reserve conveners. David Jamieson retired last year as convener of Cullaloe Reserve; this position has been taken over by Ross Millar. Stewart Bonar has resigned as convener of Carlingnose Reserve but will remain on the management group; his place as convener will be taken by John Done. My thanks to all the reserve conveners for their hard work in what is sometimes a difficult job. We are always seeking volunteers to help on the reserves, to undertake practical work but also for monitoring and generally keeping an eye on what happens. If you live near a reserve and would like to become involved in any way, please let me know.

We have taken some pride for a number of years in the activities of the Tree Group, a local initiative which has been very successful in involving members in growing native trees from local seeds and providing a supply of saplings. However it has become increasingly difficult to find volunteers for

uplifting and planting operations. Paul Blackburn retired as organiser last year and we have been seeking a replacement for some time. Unfortunately we have been unsuccessful and the Members' Centre committee has decided with great reluctance to close the group. We are very grateful to all those who have worked for the group in the past and, particularly the three organisers, Carol Spragge, Ian Higgins and Paul Blackburn. Arrangements are being made to find good homes for the trees currently in the nursery by the end of the year. Disappointing; but the group has had a long and successful period, a credit to those involved.

On a more positive note, we have heard recently that funding for the 'flying flock' has been secured for the next three years. The flock has been giving stalwart service on several of our reserves and improvements are already being demonstrated by the formal vegetation monitoring. There are plenty of opportunities for more volunteer shepherds; contact me if you are interested.

We are also seeking volunteers for several other activities and particularly for someone to co-ordinate the programme of outings and evening talks. We are also particularly keen for more people to become involved in West Fife and Kinross as this would enable us to expand our activities in these areas. Do contact me if you think you might be able to spare a small amount of time; I would be delighted to hear from you. I hope you enjoy the winter programme and look forward to meeting you at some of our activities.

Jean Stewart

## ACCOMMODATING BATS

When the Trust acquired seven hectares of dune grassland at Dumbarrie Links as a reserve in 1998, it became the owner not only of a fine piece of natural habitat but also of two brick-and-concrete pill-boxes dating from the Second World War. Although some might consider these to be blots on a natural landscape, they have added to the variety of wildlife on the reserve by providing a good surface for the colonisation of lichens and suitable nesting sites for several swallows. Since similar structures elsewhere had been successfully modified to provide refuges for bats, a bid for funds to do the same at Dumbarrie Links was included in the proposals to improve reserves submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This five-year project has just been completed, with the installation of new signs and interpretation boards at many of our reserves and the conversion of one of the Dumbarrie pill-boxes as a bat refuge. This was done in March by the Fife SWT Conservation Team and

involved the fitting of a solid steel door, with a grill above to allow access for the bats (and the swallows), the blocking of the small 'windows' and the application of wooden laths to the inner walls to provide suitable crevices for the bats.

Now we can only wait and see, and watch at dusk for bats coming and going. With 837 different species of insects already recorded on the reserve, the bats must surely be attracted to such 5-star accommodation and menu!

Gordon Corbet

**WELCOME to all the 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.**

# FIFE BARN OWL PROJECT

This project was formed in 2000 by Willie Irvine and Mark Oksien to improve our knowledge of the status and distribution of the Barn Owl in Fife. The aims of the project are to record and monitor the population and distribution in Fife and to support and encourage an increase in the population by providing nest boxes in suitable habitat.

These aims are progressing well with established pairs continuing to breed successfully, whilst the numbers of new confirmed, probable and possible breeding pairs increase annually.

The main benefit of erecting nest boxes is the provision of breeding and roosting and alternative roosting sites. Barn Owls prefer to breed and roost in enclosed dark hollows and cavities and although they seldom have more than one nesting site they do use more than one roosting site. The availability of several roosting sites is as important as the nest site itself, both in the breeding and non-breeding season, enabling pairs to roost together or apart. Often once eggs are laid the male will roost separately and later both adults will leave their young unattended roosting nearby and only returning to the nest to feed the young. Thus the provision of more than one box makes a site more attractive and beneficial to breeding birds.

The changing countryside is impacting upon the Barn Owl, with reductions in their food supply due to modern and intensive land usage and in their breeding and roosting sites through the loss of old farm buildings and tree hollows. However we can lessen the impact of the latter by providing alternative sites with the use of nest boxes.

At this relatively early stage we are unable to quantify whether the recorded increase in the breeding population and sightings is due to the ongoing discovery of the existing population or whether this expansion is due to increased survival of both adults and young birds. Perhaps it is a bit of both. In recent years where possible the young have been ringed. Whilst only three of these have so far been recovered, we are now aiming to capture adult birds to determine their origins.

In terms of the breeding population the project is currently centred on the east end of Fife but this will expand as and when new information comes to hand. Full coverage of Fife is still some way off so details of any sightings are always

welcome particularly from outwith the East Neuk area (see contact details below). All records will be treated as confidential.

The project currently monitors 50 nest boxes and tree cavities of which half are actively used by Barn Owls. Our current data clearly establish the East Neuk as their stronghold and the comparison of current breeding territory habitats would suggest that Fife as a whole is capable of supporting a much larger population than that currently known. There would appear to be a reasonably plentiful food source available even during the winter months. Analysis of pellets from four different territories identified their prey in order of quantity as Common Shrew, *Sorex araneus* (64), Field Vole, *Microtus agrestis* (43), Wood Mouse, *Apodemus sylvaticus* (13) and Skylark, *Alauda arvensis* (1).

Data collected by this project will also feed into the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Barn Owl Monitoring Programme (BOMP). This is a national programme, sponsored by The Sheepdrome Trust, and is aimed at improving the annual monitoring of this much under-recorded species.

The Barn Owl is a UK "Species of Conservation Concern" and is included in the "Red Data Birds", and Amber listed in "Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man" and the Fife Biodiversity Action Plan. Great care should be taken not to disturb any birds found. It should also be noted that they are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (listed under Schedule 1) where a special licence, issued by Scottish Natural Heritage, is required to visit and disturb breeding birds. Both Willie and Mark are Schedule 1 licence holders.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many landowners and farmers for their positive, friendly co-operation and access given to us in support of this project.

**Contacts:** Mark Oksien, 32 Struan Drive, Inverkeithing, Fife KY11 1AR (Tel: 01383 419503), Email: [markoksien@btinternet.com](mailto:markoksien@btinternet.com); Willie Irvine, 6 Pickford Crescent, Cellardyke, Anstruther, Fife KY10 8AL (Tel: 01333 310813); Rab Shand (Fife County Bird Recorder), 33 Liddle Drive, Bo'ness, West Lothian EH51 0PA (Tel: 01506 825101), Email: [rabshand@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:rabshand@blueyonder.co.uk)

## GROWING WILD IN FIFE

ITV celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by joining with The Big Lottery Fund to fund a number of environmental projects throughout Britain. Three of these were to be in Scotland with grants of £50,000 for each project. Voting by viewers took place and the Scottish Wildlife Trust project, Grow Wild in Fife, was successful in getting a grant.

The proposal originated through discussions with the Benarty Regeneration Action Group (BRAG) Centre at Crosshill as to how the area of derelict land at the Centre could be made available for community use. When Peoples Millions invited the submission of projects we thought that other villages could benefit from similar gardens. Areas of derelict land in five Fife communities were identified with the help of Donald Murdoch from Fife Council. These areas are to be converted into wildlife community gardens for use and enjoyment of local residents. In addition to the wasteland at the side of the BRAG centre in Crosshill, the areas chosen were the former railway sidings in Oakley, the disused childrens' play area at Martin Crescent, Ballingry, the former bleaching green on the coastal footpath at Torryburn and the waste site opposite the Auld Shank in Ballingry.

Unfortunately the Auld Shank cannot now proceed due to problems with one of the landowners. Instead a reserve site at the end of Rosewell Drive has been substituted. In the course of constructing these wildlife community gardens SWT will work with unemployed people in the communities providing training and qualifications in a range of rural skills such as chainsaw operation, brushcutting, footpath construction, tree planting, hedge-laying, wildflower meadow creation and other skills. It is expected that this training will help local residents to carry out ongoing maintenance of the sites. Local communities will be actively involved in the design of the gardens and a number of school groups have already participated in the Oakley sidings project through the involvement of Ben Guyer of Inzievar Primary School.

Work has started at Crosshill, Oakley and Ballingry. We hope later on to provide updates on progress on all the sites.

Alan Graham, Conservation Teams Manager,  
Scottish Wildlife Trust

## INTRODUCING OUR NEW RESERVE MANAGER

This year there have been many staff changes within Scottish Wildlife Trust as the results of the recent staff review have been implemented. One consequence is that the former post of Conservation Manager for Fife and Clackmannanshire has gone, to be replaced with that of Reserve Manager East Central Scotland, a post that covers not only Fife and Clackmannanshire but also the area of the former Conservation Manager post at Falkirk. This has meant that Steve Blow has moved to cover South West Scotland and that I, formerly Falkirk Conservation Manager, now have the responsibility of managing the reserves in both these areas.

I have been with the Trust for a total of 11 years now, beginning as Manager of the then new Cumbernauld Greenspaces, and continuing when the post subsequently became that of Conservation Manager for North Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire. As I am originally from Glasgow, you may see a pattern forming here as I move gradually further and further East.

As Reserve Manager my job differs from that of Conservation Manager in that the Reserve Managers are responsible solely for reserve matters and will not get involved in other issues such as planning matters, wildlife sites protection, local biodiversity action plans (other than when they impinge on reserve management) or other local campaigning. The

increased number of reserves that we are all involved with are likely to be quite time-consuming but I hope that these other areas, which are all very important, will get taken care of by other means.

Taking over the reserves in Fife is extremely exciting with lots of new things to experience in a wide range of habitat types and species, some of which are less familiar to me as a west coaster. So there is quite a lot to learn and a lot to do, although, thankfully, the greater part of the Reserve Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has been completed, thanks to great effort by my predecessor Steve Blow and the army of volunteers and reserve conveners here in Fife. Nevertheless there is still plenty happening including co-ordinating the erection of the new reserve signs and interpretation boards on many of the reserves. These new eye-catching signs that will raise the profile of the Trust throughout Scotland should all be in place by the time you read this article and, hopefully, many of you will have seen them.

I look forward to meeting most of you either on the reserves as visitors or volunteers (always plenty of opportunities to get involved) or at Trust meetings and events.

*Andrew Jones, Reserve Manager East Central Scotland,  
Email: [ajones@swt.org.uk](mailto:ajones@swt.org.uk), Tel: 01236 617115*

## DON'T FENCE ME IN!

As many of you will know, Fleecefaulds reserve is part of SWT's grazing project and is one of the sites which the flying flock have been visiting for the last three years. Unfortunately, the sheep took their responsibilities a bit too seriously and started to break through the fence into a small area of tree planting, known as Spragge's Spinney. They weren't actually damaging the trees by eating them but the tubes and posts were convenient scratching posts! Spragge's Spinney is almost the only part of Fleecefaulds which is outside the meadow SSSI and where we are allowed to plant native trees, so we were not too happy about the attention being paid to it by the sheep.

However, thanks to a very generous donation by Frank and Carol Spragge and a day's work by the conservation team, the young trees are now (hopefully) sheep-proof.

If you visited Fleecefaulds this summer you will have noticed that the sheep were grazing the reserve at that time. Some flowers will inevitably be damaged but it was felt necessary to have summer grazing to knock back the invasive hogweed and raspberry for a year. Conservation grazing is always a case of sensitive balance between the needs of different plants and of the sheep themselves.

*Alison Irvine*

## SPRINGTIME AT BIRNIE AND GADDON LOCHS

On a late April morning, the sun shone brilliantly from a blue sky as a baker's dozen joined Norman Elkins around the lochs at Birnie, Gaddon and Angle Park. We were on the lookout for summer migrants, as well as resident birds.

Around Birnie Loch we saw and heard many birds including goldcrests, willow warblers, wrens, chaffinches, sedge warblers, sand martins and swallows, blackcaps, blue tits, robins, dunnocks, song thrushes, woodpigeons and black-headed gulls on the rafts. On the loch itself we saw mallards, goldeneyes, tufted ducks, coots and mute swans. Overhead a buzzard was being mobbed by rooks. Blossoms were out on the blackthorn bushes and we saw at least two hoverflies (one mimicking a bumble bee and the other a green bottle fly). Peacock butterflies and bumblebees were feeding on willow catkins, and a green-veined white butterfly darted through wildflowers including marsh-marigold, red dead-nettle, coltsfoot, forget-me-nots and daisies.

From the Gaddon hide we saw herons, and on the island lapwings, one with four chicks following, and oystercatchers incubating. Reed buntings were demolishing the bulrushes

and spreading fluff. Swallows were swooping and drinking and goldfinches singing. Tufted ducks and coots cruised among the reeds and the GNER train rumbled past on its way from Inverness to Kings Cross.

The two lochs at Angle Park revealed a great crested grebe, a dabchick, a greylag goose and a pink-footed goose sitting together, 10 mute swans, tufted ducks and coots, herons and moorhens in the reeds. Rooks, jackdaws and various gulls flew past, while chiffchaffs and chaffinches sang. On the gorse flowers we spotted a shield bug, more bumble bees, a honey bee, a queen wasp and another hoverfly mimicking a wasp. Butterflies included small tortoiseshells, peacocks, small and green veined whites, and orange tips, seeking nectar on the lesser celandine and speedwell. A young horse-rider splashed through the shallows to the pine woods on the other side of the loch.

A wonderful outing indeed, and our thanks again to Norman Elkins for leading us.

*Vi Shannon*

# SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST: FIFE AND KINROSS MEMBERS CENTRE

## PROGRAMME FOR SUMMER 2006-2007

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, 01334 475763, email [JeanStewart18@aol.com](mailto:JeanStewart18@aol.com)*

### SEPTEMBER

#### Fungal Foray

Saturday 9 September, Star Moss, meet at Village Hall, Star near Markinch, 14.00.

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, 10.00 to 16.00

Still time to come along and support your local Members Centre who will be helping to host this national event! If you have not already booked, contact HQ at Cramond.

### OCTOBER

#### Crail Coffee Morning

Saturday 14 October, Crail Parish Church Hall, 10.00 -12.00  
Please come and support this fund-raising effort. Stalls will include home baking & produce, plants, SWT sales goods and books. Tickets (£1) from committee members or at the door. Contact Stephanie Thrower (01333 312 631) for further information or to volunteer.

#### Outing to Morton Lochs (morning only)

Saturday 28 October, meet at Morton Lochs car park 10.00  
Tom Cunningham, Reserve Manager of Tentsmuir Point National Nature Reserve will lead this morning outing. Contact Tom Cunningham, 01382 553 704.

### NOVEMBER

#### Members Centre AGM and Members Night

Monday 20 November, Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd, Cupar, 19.30

We hope to have updates from our reserves and reports of other local SWT activities. This is always an interesting evening and all are welcome. Contact Vi Shannon 01334 653296

### DECEMBER

#### Fife's Forgotten Kingdom

Tuesday 12 December, Supper Room, Town Hall, St Andrews, 19.30

Tony Wilson of Fife Ranger Service will give an illustrated talk on the weird world of mushrooms and toadstools.

### JANUARY

#### Inverkeithing: Joint Meeting with the Green Gang

*Date to be confirmed.*

Contact Dorothy MacDonald 01383 414194 for further details.

#### Loch Leven and the River Leven - a landscape transformed

Monday 29 January, St. Bryce Kirk Centre, St. Brycedale Avenue, Kirkcaldy, 19.00 (please note start time)

Dr David Munro, historical geographer, has a life-long interest in the Loch Leven area and will give an illustrated talk on the history of the landscape. Joint meeting with Kirkcaldy Naturalists' Society.

## WILDLIFE CARD BARGAINS

*Your Sales Reps Rosemary Story and Maggie Stracey are pleased to offer the opportunity of purchasing bumper packs of assorted, high quality wildlife cards – Christmas and Birthday cards and Notelets – at bargain prices. So don't miss out on this offer, available at Trust events throughout the year, or by phoning 01334 473756 or 01334 473971 to arrange collection (postage costs are generally prohibitive).*

## CONTACTS

Members Centre Website [www.swt-fife.org.uk](http://www.swt-fife.org.uk)

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Take a Pride in Fife Environmental Information Centre (TAPIC

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Articles, news, snippets from contributors both old and new will be welcome. Please feel free to contact me to discuss your ideas.  
**All contributions by 1 September 2006.**



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