

The newsletter of the _____



Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust



No 69 Spring 2007

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Wednesday morning, late August, our autumn copy of Scottish Wildlife and 'FAWN 68' arrived in the post just as I was starting to write my Chairman's Column for FAWN 69, with two days to go to the editorial deadline. It is difficult to be topical!

By the time you read this, the Trust will have published its 'Vision' for the next twenty-five years. This was debated at Council and I am fully supportive of the final document. But what about our local 'vision'? Of course this reflects the national thinking but we do tend to work at a more focused, day-to-day level with our regular activities of talks and outings, fundraising and work on reserves. All these provide the opportunity for people to experience wildlife at first hand and to become involved with the Trust.

However I feel we could do more and the following are high on my personal list: (a) a greater involvement of members in our reserves, not just working on them but visiting them and enjoying the wildlife there; (b) more activities for children and young people; (c) a greater input to the planning process; (d) more political involvement, particularly with the forthcoming elections to the Scottish Parliament.

I am sure there are others but I am trying to be realistic! My resolution is to start by visiting reserves more frequently. We have wonderful reserves in our area and they are open all year round. Details of these and all the Trust's reserves throughout Scotland are in the booklet 'Exploring Reserves' (available on request from Cramond).

An account is given elsewhere in FAWN of an excellent outing to Fleecefaulds Meadow Reserve; the same week I visited Carlingnose and Lielowan Reserves and watched hundreds, literally, of butterflies including a clouded yellow at Carlingnose, a first for me in Fife. At Lielowan I heard ravens croaking overhead and watched a family of whitethroats. From Carlingnose I saw sandwich terns, guillemots and razorbills, the latter feeding well-grown chicks in the Firth.

There is a wealth of wildlife on our doorsteps. If you have no time to support the Trust in any other way, do get out to the reserves and enjoy them.

Jean Stewart

OTTERS ON LOCH OF THE LOWES

The highlight of doing the evening shift of Osprey Egg Security Watch at Loch of the Lowes has always been getting close-up views of the osprey fishing right in front of the hide, but in 2006, my tenth year of Osprey Watch, it was the otters which reigned supreme, giving me what can only be described as a lifetime's otter watching in just one evening.

I not only long for the return of the ospreys in March, and to be a volunteer guarding their eggs, but for the chance to watch these wonderful otters again. I would imagine quite a few other people will be wanting to signing up as volunteers, when there is so much to watch. Here are last year's notes.

Saturday 13th May, 2006 8.05pm Two large adult otters played in and out of the bright green short reeds over beside the "canal" for 35 minutes, swimming backwards and forwards in the open water, as well as climbing out onto the banking and running along the sides of the canal. After dark loud high pitched squeaking and squawking noises were heard coming from the canal area.

Sunday 14 May, 2006, 8pm First one otter cub, about 2 feet in length, appeared very close to the hide and it came in closer and closer until it would turn and face the hide and stare up at our faces peering out at it, before coming right in among the reeds immediately below us.

As if that wasn't enough, a group of three otter cubs then swam past the hide together and while George and Susan (visitor centre) were watching them, I spotted splashing and otter-wakes over by the canal again, and discovered there were three more cubs splashing and playing over there! They made their

way down the end of the loch towards us, keeping close to the big fawn reeds.

During the next hour or so we kept seeing them popping up here and there in the choppy water. We had been joined by off duty night shift staff Mark and Amy who had come out in the hope of seeing the osprey fishing. All seemed to be quiet when one cub appeared from the crannog hide area, and swam over to the island and then proceeded to swim at great speed backwards and forwards in the calm waters near the canal entrance, until it seemed to shoot across under the water (at 70 mph!) Then it came up for air with a huge fish - not joking, the fish was about 5 to 6 lbs in weight and we think it was a pike.

The cub swam to the shore with its catch which was as big as itself, landing it on the beach before dragging it up onto the banking, where it chewed right through the middle. Leaving one half lying on the bank, the cub took the other half a few feet further up the bank, and set about eating it. About 15 minutes later it headed back towards the canal and disappeared, leaving the uneaten half of the fish lying on the bank.

Evie Gilchrist

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.

CONSERVATION THROUGH RINGING

The practice of bird marking stretches back to at least Roman times, and was widespread amongst mediaeval falconers. However, true scientific ringing has its origins in the work of the Dane, Christian Mortensen, who found a novel use for this new fangled aluminium by fashioning it into bird rings. Mortensen began ringing in 1899; other European ornithologists rapidly appreciated the possibilities for bird study this opened up, with a Hungarian scheme being set up in 1903, and the famous Heligoland bird observatory set up in 1904. The British, of course, started two totally independent schemes, both in 1909, one in Aberdeen and the other through the journal, *British Birds*.

So why the interest in ringing? Simply put, for the first time it allowed us to follow birds through time and space. At the beginning of the twentieth century much of the knowledge we now take for granted about migration routes, wintering and breeding sites, and how long birds lived was unknown. As techniques improved and statistical analysis became more sophisticated, issues such as life strategies, survival rates, mortality factors and population estimates could be addressed. While much of this information is of intrinsic interest in our all-consuming interest in the lives of our feathered cohabitants, it also helps us address and target key conservation issues.

The Tay Ringing Group operates over much of Fife, Tayside and areas of Central and Strathclyde (alongside other independent ringers and groups). With such a diverse area it is unsurprising that the group is involved in a great variety of projects, ranging from the protection and monitoring of ospreys, the re-introduction of golden eagles into Ireland, radio tracking

of water rails in the Tay reed beds, the colour marking of black-tailed godwits on the Eden, as well as a host of background studies such as modelling of the bearded tit population, yellowhammer movements, and productivity and survival studies of passerines.

Many of these projects are undertaken with a wide range of partners, and we have also been extraordinarily fortunate in the support provided by many landowners, groups such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Scottish Natural Heritage. This year the group would very much like to thank the Tayside Biodiversity Fund for helping fund studies on the Tay reed beds (linking bird numbers to management), radio tracking ring ouzels, and satellite monitoring of marsh harriers.

Ringing is a real privilege, the joy of holding something as stunning as a fresh plumaged male teal or picking a South African ringed swallow from the nets being hard to convey in words. Tay Ringing Group very much appreciates the support that many readers of FAWN have offered over the years, both by reporting ringed birds and in purchasing bird food from the group. The purchase of bird food is our main source of income (we sell black sunflower, sunflower hearts, peanuts, niger seed and table seed). Anyone interested in ringing or supporting our work can contact me on 01334 870988 or 07988 676289.

You can follow the fortunes of our satellite tagged marsh harriers through Tayside Biodiversity Partnership or directly through www.roydennis.org.

Les Hatton

SNAPSHOT OF FLEECEFAULDS, WITH CHILDREN

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in mid-August a group of about 30 people met at Fleecefaulds Meadow to search for butterflies and other insects as well as view the abundant wild flowers of late summer. It was a delight to see so many interested children in the group and the presence of experts in various fields of natural history were welcomed by a number of fascinated novices.

The children were particularly enthralled by the insects which could be viewed in greater detail in the bug boxes supplied by our leader, Alison Irvine. Amongst the great number and variety of insects identified were hover-flies, a crane-fly, the beetle *Crepidodera transversa*, froghoppers, spiders and to the further excitement, especially of our younger members, the vibrant green *Cicadella viridis*, a leafhopper.

In all, nine species of butterflies delighted our party. Peacocks and red admirals displayed their vibrant colourings, large, small

and green-veined whites, a tortoiseshell, painted lady, small copper and meadow brown completed the list of those found. A few moths were spotted with the silver y in most abundance and a number of young frogs were jumping around in the undergrowth.

The variety of wild flowers in bloom was not so great as June or July which demonstrates the importance of visiting Fleecefaulds regularly throughout the summer. Nevertheless, the abundance of flowers encouraged the rich diversity of insect life. Knapweed was plentiful. Lesser stitchwort, sneezewort and greater birdsfoot trefoil were in flower on the slope and marsh woundwort was brightly coloured in the lower lying areas.

The enjoyment of the afternoon was greatly enhanced by the expertise of our leader, Alison Irvine, and other experts present who patiently answered our questions. We are also grateful to Jean Stewart for organising the visit.

Elizabeth Gray

BUTTERFLIES, BUTTERFLIES.....one member's sightings

With the coldness of spring and of early summer in 2006 there were few butterflies around. Once the few overwintering peacocks and small tortoiseshells which I came across at St. Andrews Botanic Garden had gone from the scene in April there was nothing to excite me until we had orange tips, which are now sighted regularly all over Fife, on schedule in June and "browns" like ringlets and meadow browns took over a month later on our grasslands.

Things seemed to indicate an orderly return to normal as summer warmed up. A visit to Star Moss in June had also revealed the continuing presence of small pearl bordered fritillaries, supplemented by my first and early sighting of a migrant painted lady and a red admiral. As July approached a walk across the Lomond Hills revealed the presence of common blues and small heaths along the path's edge.

Things perked up again in August with the arrival of more

painted ladies and red admirals, and peacocks too brought colour to my garden as they basked on window sills in the morning before treating themselves to nectar from my late-flowering, yellow buddleia, which they accepted to share with numerous bumblebees including enormous queen bufftails which were fuelling up prior to hibernation.

At this time there were also a few small whites and large whites fluttering by to assess the potential of a few calabrese in the vegetable plot as a possible site for egg-laying. However, small tortoiseshells, often miscalled "red admirals" in Fife in spite of once being its commonest colourful butterfly, remained inexplicably absent, the title now most definitely having been assumed by the peacock if the numbers on the buddleia by the gate at St Andrews Botanic Garden were anything to go by. By this time the season had closed for the vice-chairman and me as we departed for Australasia.

Tom Gray

COUNTING SHEEP

As a small boy living on a hill farm I was in awe of the adults around me who did grown-up things in the fields and managed the animals. I have no memory of wanting to be a train driver but I did dream of being a shepherd. I cannot remember all the details but my dreams always included a biblical type crook, several dogs and a bleak and spectacular craggy mountainside. But it was not to be. My mother had other plans for me and the dream was filed away in the recesses of unfinished business. It was unlikely that a fairy godmother would ever appear and make this proposal, especially in my old age.

But miracles do happen and about a year ago one evening she phoned. She said her name was Alison Irvine and would I like to be a shepherd! Well of course I said I would but I was realistic enough not to expect to get four dogs and a big craggy mountain. I could get the crook myself no problem.

Alison was not asking me to be a REAL shepherd - that work is done by Tim Brain and Laura Cunningham - but to be a duty checker on the days when they were not available.

The task of the volunteer checker is fairly simple. You are expected to visit the flying flock at the Reserve they are currently grazing, count them, check they can all stand, take a general look at fences and ensure that all the sheep are in the sector of the Reserve they are meant to be in. The most likely serious shepherding task is to remove a wayward member of the flock from its stuck position half-way through a boundary fence. Even more than people, sheep seem to believe that the grass is greener on the far side of the fence.

Alison does not discourage a checker from having a wee daydream. So you can sit having your breakfast in Fleecefaulds Meadow under Frank Spragge's Queen's Gean and give free rein to your childhood fantasy of the big mountain, the four dogs and all that. You might even sing a suitable nursery rhyme. After all, you may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb....

Jack Daniels

BROCK WOOD

Brock Wood, in East Lothian, has been generously gifted to the Scottish Wildlife Trust by David Jamieson, a long-standing SWT member and resident of Aberdour.

David has only recently retired as convener of the management committee for Cullaloe Wildlife Reserve, near Burntisland. He will however become convener for Brock Wood. There's never a shortage of work with SWT!

The Scottish Wildlife Trust would like to take this opportunity to thank David for this very generous gift and for all the voluntary

work that he has undertaken for the trust over the last thirty years.

Brock Wood is a 17 hectare mixed woodland but with a substantial area of wet grassland, set in a narrow glen, known locally as a dean or cleugh. Its main biodiversity interest is the upland oak wood component and alder wood, both of which are rare in a Lothian context.

*Alan Anderson, Conservation Operations Manager,
Scottish Wildlife Trust*

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

There are a lot of volunteers who work in different ways to pull together the events and activities organised by the Fife and Kinross Members Centre. I know that every little bit of assistance really does count, and I hope that some members reading this may feel like coming forward to offer their help in various ways.

I wanted to do more for the Scottish Wildlife Trust than simply paying the subscription fee. So I was pleased to be asked just over a year ago if I would take over the Public Relations side of the Members Centre. My role is to contact newspapers and try and build a relationship with them, and to source alternative promotional areas such as the Events in Fife publication, Scottish Wildlife Trust and other websites, and wherever else I can locate that can assist us. We now have listings in most of the Fife papers on a fairly regular basis and these papers are also happy to include our editorials about events, sometimes even with photos, again to help promote what activities we do.

It is an interesting role as I am gaining an insight into how newspapers work, who you need to know and when to call them: once this is achieved it is fairly easy to maintain a good relationship with them.

We are lucky to have our own website www.swt-fife.org.uk which is updated by Bruce Borrows. However, we always need other ways to bring in new members to the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and, having got my teeth into the job, I am now exploring other avenues by which we can promote our activities.

I have met a host of other members who are great to know and who have helped me to understand how the local members centre works. Finding some of their houses in the depths of the countryside round St Andrews does prove interesting for someone from South of the Border, but I have been made to feel very welcome!

Heather McLean

TIM BRAIN'S ORCHID MEADOW

A small select group gathered on a lovely late June evening last year to see my meadow. We set off to see what we could find in this comparatively small north facing meadow. The area around where people parked had a red look about it because of the abundance of sorrel flowers. When we reached the meadow proper the predominant colour changed to yellow with bird's foot trefoil, tormentil, meadow buttercup and some bulbous buttercup.

This year the number of orchids had dropped dramatically and those that were there were late in flowering due to the cold late spring. I could not give a reason for the drop in numbers, but it

is a recorded fact that orchids can have sudden declines in numbers from one year to the next.

However, we found a few great butterfly orchids, one or two of which were fully out, and quite a lot of common spotted, most of which were only just starting to show some colour, as was the eyebright which was very abundant in places. We spent a pleasant couple of hours, as there was plenty to see.

Tim Brain

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FIFE & KINROSS MC PROGRAMME FOR SPRING 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, tel 01334 475763, e-mail JeanStewart18@aol.com

If you would like to receive email reminders and updates about changes to the programme, including notice of additional events, just email Jean and she'll add you to her list.

JANUARY

The Fife Coastal Path - N. Queensferry to Leven

Thursday 18 January at 7.30pm in St Peter's Episcopal Church Hall, Hope Street, Inverkeithing

Stewart Bonar of Fife Ranger Service will give an illustrated talk on the wildlife to be found along the path. Joint meeting with the Church Green Gang. Contact Dorothy MacDonald (01383 414194) for further details.

Loch Leven and the River Leven - a landscape transformed

Monday 29 January 2007 at 1900 (please note start time)

St. Bryce Kirk Centre, St. Brycedale Avenue, Kirkcaldy (Joint meeting with Kirkcaldy Naturalists' Society). 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. Contact Jean Stewart 01334 475763.

FEBRUARY

Whales and Whaling

Tuesday 20 February, Crail Parish Church Hall, 19.30

Ian Cumming, the cetacean recorder for Fife, will give an illustrated talk on whales and dolphins and will include aspects of the history of the whaling industry. Contact Stephanie Throver (01333 312631).

Outing to Eden Estuary

Saturday 24 February, meeting place to be confirmed, 10.00

Les Hatton, Ranger for the Eden Estuary, will lead this morning outing. For further details see the local website or contact Jean Stewart 01334 475763.

MARCH

Insect Photography

Wednesday 21 March, Lomond Centre, Glenrothes, 19.30

Liz Douglas, Insect photographer. Joint meeting with Pitcairn Society. Contact Alison Irvine 01337 830 366

APRIL

Gardening for Wildlife

Wednesday 4 April, Auchtermuchty Town Hall, 19.30

Drew Jones, Reserves Manager for our area, will give an illustrated talk on how to encourage wildlife to the garden. Contact Kate Morison (01337 828058).

MAY

Guddling amongst the Rock Pools

Saturday 12 May, meet at West Braes car park, Pittenweem, 2 pm (car park is at the west end of the village and is signed from the main coast road as 'Coastal Path' parking. Do not confuse with 'harbour parking' which is nearer the centre of the village)

Deirdre Munro of Fife Ranger Service will lead this outing to look at the fascinating range of plants and animals on the seashore. This outing is suitable for families with children of all ages. Wellingtons essential. Contact Deirdre Munro (07951 349951).

FIFE ACCESS FORUM

Paul Blackburn is to represent the Members Centre on Fife Access Forum, focusing on how the access legislation affects conservation interests. If you have concerns about any actions affecting conservation interests, such as uncontrolled dogs, people disturbing wader roosts etc. you can report these to Paul, tel. 01382 542826, email paul@blackburn95.fsnet.co.uk.

CONTACTS

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Take a Pride in Fife Environmental Information Centre (TAPIFEIC) [formerly FERN] Simon Scott, 01592 413550, email simon.scott@fife.gov.uk

Perth & Kinross Biological Records Centre 01738 632488

EDITOR OF FAWN

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Deadline for contributions to be advised



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