

The newsletter of the



Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust

No 71 Autumn 2007



CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Forty years ago, on 11 May 1967, the Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* Branch of the SWT held its inaugural meeting at the New Philp Hall, Kirkcaldy. Dr David Spence was elected chairman and the Reverend G.E.T. Brooks became Honorary Secretary. Committee members included Dr Jean Balfour, Dr John Berry, William McCormac, Hamish Brown and George Ballantyne. Len Gomersall, a member of the interim group, accepted a position as Assessor to the committee. Sadly some of these people are no longer with us but several remain very supportive of the Trust. Jean Balfour is of course our current president; Hamish Brown and George Ballantyne have in the last few years given talks at Trust meetings or led outings.

In 1967, the Branch had one reserve, Bankhead Moss, open to members or others by permit. Speakers for the winter session of 1967/68 included Ken Williamson, Dr Joe Eggeling and Christopher Mylne. George Ballantyne led a field meeting, to Dumbarnie Links; a subsequent meeting was arranged to Ferry Hills, North Queensferry.

In my final year as chairman of the Members' Centre, I feel

rather humbled by all that has gone before and by the experience and knowledge of those involved with the Trust in Fife and Kinross. We have however built on these foundations of 40 years ago. We now have 10 reserves, all open to the general public and with a network of people involved in their management. We have a full and varied programme of outings and lectures and over 2000 members in Fife and Kinross. We have also been involved in organising election hustings, fundraising and representing the Trust on several local organisations.

Forty years on, we are still very much an active organisation. Let's keep it that way!

Jean Stewart

*[*Clackmannan later joined the Stirling Branch, and all subsequently became Members Centres.]*

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.

FORESTRY AND FIFE

In 2006 the Scottish Executive issued its second Forestry Strategy since 1997. It is based on a vision of our forestry resource in the second half of the 21st Century, and prioritises what needs to be done over the next decade in order to realise that vision. It takes account of current opportunities and challenges, and complements several of the Executive's other policies (eg. those on agriculture, energy, housing, access and public health). It envisages three main outcomes. Only the briefest outline of the key points can be given here, together with a personal view about how Fife might be affected.

Firstly, the health and well-being of people and their communities will be improved through a closer association between people and woodlands, particularly those in their own locality. To some extent this is already taking place in Fife. There are walking, cycling and horse-riding trails within woodlands. We have Woodland In and Around Towns initiatives, and people are being consulted about how woodlands are managed, as in the Ladybank area, and we have a number of community owned woodlands (occasionally assisted by organisations such as the Woodland Trust).

Secondly, forestry businesses (whether woodland management or timber processing) will be competitive, innovative, and contributing towards the Scottish economy. In addition to the existing range of markets which should be capable of accepting more Scottish timber there are also emerging wood-fuel and biomass markets, and we are very likely to see more of these in Fife. There would be economic and environmental benefits in having more locally based outlets for all timbers. Given that over a third of all woodlands

in Fife are a potential source of hardwood timber a suitable local market would be welcome.

Thirdly, woodlands will be robust and adaptable environments, facilitating the conservation of biodiversity, soil and water, improving air quality, contributing to landscape quality and helping to adapt to climate change. It is envisaged that the proportion of native tree species in woodlands will increase and the 'condition' of most semi-natural woodlands and priority habitats, as well as the population status of woodland-related priority species, will be 'favourable', or very nearly so. The main opportunity in Fife will probably be protecting key locations for the red squirrel.

The forestry sector has already been directed by the Executive to deliver annual carbon savings of up to one million tonnes of carbon per annum by 2020. This means locating some new woodlands on fertile low carbon soils, such as we have in parts of Fife, and/or modifying woodland management. There is also scope to promote the use of timber in place of more energy intensive materials such as concrete and steel, and wood-fuel substitutes for fossil fuels.

It is difficult to predict the Strategy's impact on Fife. Forest expansion will probably be modest (judging by recent trends) but, as has been indicated, its location could be critically important. That, and the way in which existing woodlands are managed, will depend on how successfully the Strategy is promoted and implemented.

Alister T Jones

[This article was written before the May elections to the Scottish Parliament – Ed]

GUDDLING AMONGST THE ROCKPOOLS

Saturday 12th April dawned rather grey and damp, but as morning progressed into afternoon, the weather seemed to improve a little, which was good news for those who planned to take part in the Pittenweem rock pool guddle, due to begin at 2pm.

The meeting point for this event was the area known locally as West Braes, which lies to the west of Pittenweem village. A short walk leads to some rather dilapidated concrete steps which descend to a small sandy beach, lying at the top of an otherwise rocky section of coast. Here, among the rocks, there is also an old tidal bathing pool. This dates from between the first and second world wars, and, although no longer maintained by the local authority, it now provides a fine sheltered habitat for all sorts of marine life.

Our group, made up of a mixture of 14 children and adults, (all suitably "welly clad!"), were soon down amongst the rocks, equipped with nets and tubs.

So, what did we discover? Among the first of the creatures to find its way into someone's tub was that great childhood favourite, the shore crab. These greenish brown crabs are well camouflaged among the seaweed and can be difficult to find at first, but soon everyone had "got their eye in" and no one's tub was without at least one of these fascinating creatures! Many of the rock pool inhabitants were a bit trickier to catch though. Prawns were there too, and were also difficult to spot since they are almost transparent. They are also extremely adept at escaping, their reactions are lightning fast and they dart out of harm's way by propelling themselves backwards with their flattened tails!

Prize for best camouflage, though, would have to go to the little flatfish fry which rest in the sand at the bottom of the rock pools. These are almost impossible to see until what

looks like a tiny bit of sand appears to suddenly move before settling somewhere else! The sheltered water around the old bathing pool provides a perfect nursery for these young fish to feed and grow. Not all animals use camouflage to protect themselves. Sticking to some of the rocks were beadlet sea anemones. Far from blending in with the background, these creatures are crimson red in colour, and use stinging tentacles to catch passing prey. They are quite harmless to us though!

By the time we returned to the beach to check the tubs and compare what everyone had found, there was a good selection to look at. Between us we had managed to collect brittle stars and starfish, flat and edible periwinkles, dog whelks and chitons. There was a bright green paddle worm and a flowing scale worm. Someone had found a dead pipe fish, a strange looking relative of the sea horse, and there were plenty of hermit crabs. These endearing little creatures are a real favourite of mine! Far from being shy when caught and placed in a tub, their curiosity always seems to get the better of them, and they never hide in their shells for long! They are soon running around exploring their new surroundings and checking out any possible food!

All too soon though, we had to return all these creatures back to the rock pools where they belonged. None seemed any the worse for their unusual afternoon and they had helped to provide us with a fascinating insight into their marine world.

I hope that everyone enjoyed his or her afternoon. I know I did! The sound of the waves and the sea birds, the sea air and the sense of discovery as you look into yet another rock pool, never knowing quite what you'll find, make a rock pool guddle a great activity for *all* ages, not just for children!

Deirdre Munro, Fife Ranger Service

FROM THE HUSTINGS

Shortly before the May elections to the Scottish Parliament and Councils, we arranged a hustings in St Andrews, as we had done in 2003 at Cupar. We felt that such an event would be very enlightening and help the audience in deciding which candidate or party should have their vote. It would also give us a chance to highlight not only global matters but also local issues; and so we allocated a small area in the top hallway for other local environmental organisations to display posters and speak about their concerns.

All the parliamentary candidates were invited and in the event we had a very good response with nine on the platform on the night. (Members of the audience will be glad to know that the candidate who fainted suffered no ill effects.) Simon Pepper, Rector of St Andrews University and former Director of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Scotland took the chair on our behalf. We were extremely fortunate to have had such a competent and engaging chairman for the evening as with so many candidates it was not an easy task.

The audience provided a variety of questions, ranging from local concerns such as wind farms and greenbelt to wider ones such as general energy policy and marine legislation. Finally there was discussion on the question as to how younger people can be encouraged to become involved in environmental matters, with many believing that it would be useful to develop eco-schools in our area.

Any comments on the evening and/or suggestions for improvements would be helpful, as we may decide to hold a similar event next time.

Elizabeth Adams

OLD RAILWAY LINES IN FIFE

Old railway lines can offer a haven for wildlife which is not well recognised. In Fife, there are many long-closed lines some of which were used to transport coal from mines (eg around Thornton) and others were very rural (eg Fife coast). Many of the embankments and cuttings still exist, although a number of sections have reverted to farmland. Indeed some have been converted to cycle ways and paths (eg Dunfermline to Alloa). All railways were fenced off thus providing corridors of enclosure, free from pesticides and fertiliser.

In steam days, lineside vegetation caught fire or was burnt deliberately, thus allowing new ground for seeds. The rush of trains also wafted seeds along the line thus aiding dispersal; a classic example is Oxford ragwort. Sidings often contained ash which allowed plants such as melilots and lupins to thrive. Some parts of old lines are now covered in scrub, eg wild rose, hawthorn, and even mature trees have now grown up. These pockets provide shelter for numerous bird species and small mammals. Other old lines run close to the sea (eg Largo) and offer a wide variety of plants and butterflies.

As the fragmentation of sites of biodiversity continues, perhaps every effort should be made to keep these old thoroughfares, not only in their own right but also to allow wildlife corridors between these sites. Network Rail still owns a lot of the land. Good areas to visit are: Leuchars/Tayport line; NE Fife Railway around Kilmany and Lindores; Fife coast line Largo/Kilconquhar; Fife and Kinross Railway around Strathmiglo/ Gateside.

Jamie Lyall

PROMOTING PLANT DIVERSITY

"Promoting a diversity of plants for education and conservation" is the mission of St Andrews Botanic Garden. Diversity we have with approximately 8000 taxa displayed in habitats or species collection groups plus a good grounding in educational activities for all ages. Our conservation work may not be quite so obvious, but over the years the garden has supported projects to bring individual species back from the brink, such as the Sticky Catchfly *Lychnis viscaria*.

Currently, St Andrews is one of a network of Botanic Gardens taking part in Plant Diversity Challenge, the UK's response to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation 2002. Research showed only a small percentage of threatened species were actually held in plant collections and, following on from this, gardens were asked to adopt one or two local species to grow, record progress and develop horticultural expertise to assist recovery of populations. The plants would also be used to tell the public about our native flora and the threat it faces.

Our potential adoptees have been whittled down from a list of 68 endangered and vulnerable plants, extracted from the current Red Data List and considered to be within reasonable travelling distance of St Andrews. These are *Astragalus danicus*, Purple Milk-vetch; *Chenopodium bonus-henricus*, Good King Henry; *Gentianella campestris*, Field Gentian; *Platanthera bifolia*, Lesser Butterfly Orchid; *Saxifraga hypnoides*, Mossy Saxifrage; *Corallorhiza trifida*, Coralroot Orchid. All are local to Fife. Some of the plants will be quite amenable to cultivation, one or two such as the saprophytic orchid Coralroot may prove well nigh impossible. Good King Henry nearly got overlooked as a weed until

championed by those in the know as a once important economic plant that has followed in the footsteps of man.

Further afield we are looking at *Astragalus alpinus*, Alpine Milk-vetch; *Homogyne alpina*, Purple Colt's-foot; *Lychnis alpina*, Alpine Catchfly; *Minuartia sedoides*, Cyphel; *Phyllodoce caerulea*, Blue Heath; *Pyrola media*, Intermediate Wintergreen. Of these *Homogyne*, *Lychnis* and *Phyllodoce* are protected and require special licenses to allow seed collection.

Progress so far; making contacts, seeking advice, applying for licences, finding sites, plant hunting, plant identification and being there at the right time to harvest seed has been a whole story on its own. We hope to continue the search during 2007. To date we have received much encouragement and active help from the Friends of St Andrews Botanic Garden, Fife Countryside Rangers, SNH Tentsmuir and many others to whom thanks are due.

The Garden now has wild collected seed of Purple Milk-vetch, Field Gentian and Good King Henry, half sown in autumn 2006 and the rest sown in spring 2007. Once germinated and grown on, a group of each of the plants will be found a suitable site for display and we will research replacing back to the wild to bulk up populations. [Updated just before going to press: "We now have germination of Good King Henry (lots) and Field Gentian".]

*Lesley Cunningham, Parks Development Adviser,
Parks and Countryside Services, Fife Council*

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE ON THE ISLE OF MAY

The Isle of May lies in the entrance of the Firth of Forth, about 8 km south of the Fife Coast. Only 1.5 km long and 0.5 km wide, the island is characterised by a low lying and rocky eastern coast and a west coast dominated by high cliffs. Despite its small size the May holds spectacular seabird colonies, the largest Atlantic grey seal colony in eastern Britain, and an impressive history stretching back thousands of years.

The island is owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), and two reserve managers reside on the island for seven months of the year. The large numbers of seabirds, seals, and the maritime grassland found on the May gained protection in 1956 when the island was designated an NNR (National Nature Reserve) and subsequently given additional European protection as a part of the Forth Islands Special Protection Area (SPA) and as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The May supports over 250,000 seabirds of 12 species during the peak of the seabird season. This huge number of birds on such a small island means that nesting birds are everywhere. The main nesting areas are on the west cliffs where the large colonies include kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill and fulmar. There are over 15000 pairs of guillemot, 2975 pairs of razorbill and 3167 pairs of kittiwake. The shag population suffered from a winter wreck in 2004 but after a significant drop, the population is stabilising with 485 pairs having nested on the island in 2006.

Away from the cliffs the island also supports large numbers of breeding birds. One species which has increased dramatically in number in the past few decades is the puffin. The population has risen from a handful in 1959, to 3000-4000 pairs in 1972, with the most recent estimate in the region of 80,000 pairs. The island is increasingly becoming honeycombed with burrows.

SNH have a duty to monitor seabird species; much of this work is presently carried out jointly with the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (CEH). Data from this monitoring work is integral to the national system of long term monitoring for seabird populations, as the island is one of four strategic monitoring sites in Great Britain. The other three sites are Skomer, Canna, and Fair Isle; the work from these has a huge influence on the national monitoring strategy. The Sea Mammal Research Unit visit the May in autumn to continue their long term breeding studies of seals.

The island is also the home of the longest continuously running bird observatory and members of the observatory visit the island during the migration period to ring and log migratory passerines.

Visitors are welcome to the island during May to September inclusive; there are boats from Anstruther or North Berwick.

*Therese Alampo and Tabitha Lamont,
SNH Isle of May NNR Managers*

FIFE ACCESS FORUM

The Fife Access Forum was created following the passing of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to provide advice to Fife Council, and to any party or individual, on the exercise of access rights, the routes of rights of way, the adoption of core path plans and also to provide advice on issues that arise in the management of outdoor access.

My role is to represent the interests of SWT members and others with an interest in nature conservation so if you do have any issues relating to access to land, either where access is unnecessarily restricted, or where uncontrolled access is impacting nature conservation interests please contact me (see [Contacts](#) on back page).

Paul Blackburn

DATES FOR YOUR DAIRY



FIFE & KINROSS MC PROGRAMME FOR AUTUMN 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

To receive email reminders and updates about changes to the programme, including notice of additional events, email Jean and she'll add you to her list. For each of the outings, a local telephone contact number is given if you would like further details.

Please note that there will be a small admission charge of £2 for all indoor events, to help defray the costs.

AUGUST

Moth trapping at Barnyards Marsh Reserve

Saturday 18 August, meet at reserve entrance near car park by Kinneuchar Inn, Kilconquhar (NO 484 021), 19.30. The marsh is usually wet underfoot; wellies recommended. Elspeth Christie and other local moth enthusiasts will be operating a light trap and demonstrating the range of moths to be found at this reserve. Contact Elspeth 01337 830480.

SEPTEMBER

Geology and Lichens

Sunday 2 September, meet in the car park, Elie Ness (NO 497 998), 14.00.

Peder Aspen, a geologist who has developed a keen interest in lichens will lead this outing. Contact Peder Aspen 01383 822611.

Autumn Woodland in Dunnikier Park, Kirkcaldy

Sunday 16 September, turn off the B981 along the road just east of Kirkcaldy high School, meet at parks depot car park at top of drive (NT 275 944), 14.00.

Led by Kate Morison and Tony Wilson of Fife Ranger Service who will demonstrate the variety of trees and their associated fungi. Suitable for all ages. Contact: Kate Morison 01592 414300 (Lochore Meadows).

National AGM

Saturday 29 September, Westerwood Hotel, Cumbernauld. Full details in Scottish Wildlife.

OCTOBER

Members' Evening

Monday 1 October, Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd, Cupar, 19.30

The programme will be of particular interest to local members, focussing on our reserves. Speakers are still to be arranged. This is always an interesting evening and provides the opportunity for a good exchange of information about our local activities. Contact Vi Shannon 01334 653296.

Visit to Formonthills Community Woodland, Glenrothes

Sunday 14 October. Meet at Formonthills Car Park (NO 256 036) at 14.00.

Roy Barlow of the Woodland Trust will lead a walk to point out the features of the woodland and illustrate the Woodland Trust's work on the site to enrich the flora and fauna. Contact Bidy Gray 01592 752 372.

Coffee Morning

Saturday 20 October, Crail Parish Church Hall, Marketgate, Crail, 10.00 to 12.00.

The Crail coffee morning is always an enjoyable event, as well as raising funds for the Trust. Offers of help and donations of baking, books, plants and raffle prizes to Stephanie Thrower (01333 312 631) or any committee member, please.

NOVEMBER

Members Centre AGM and talk, 'Counting birds in Fife and beyond'

Tuesday 6 November, Auchtermuchty Town Hall, 19.30

The Members Centre AGM will be followed by a talk by Norman Elkins, a well known bird watcher and bird recorder in Fife. He will give an illustrated talk about surveys organised by the British Trust for Ornithology on both garden birds and the new national atlas.

OUR NEW RESERVES MANAGER IN POST: Alistair Whyte has been appointed as the new Reserves Manager for East Central Scotland. His most recent position was as a policy officer for Scottish Natural Heritage in Clydebank and previously as a reserve manager for a National Nature Reserve on the Solway coast. Alistair will be responsible for managing the eighteen reserves in Falkirk, Clackmannanshire as well as Fife where he will also line manage the two Conservation Shepherds on the Flying Flock project. He will be based in the Cumbernauld office: see [Contacts](#) below.

CONTACTS

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

Chairman Jean Stewart, 01334 475763, email JeanStewart18@aol.com

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Fife Access Forum Contact Paul Blackburn, 0138 542826, email paul@blackburn95.fsnet.co.uk

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SWT Headquarters (Cramond) 0131 312 7765 Website: www.swt.org.uk

Take a Pride in Fife Environmental Information Centre (TAPICEIC) [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 1 September 2007.



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