

The newsletter of the



# Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust

No 73 Summer 2008



## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

*As the newly elected chairman of Fife and Kinross Members Centre, I am both excited and, at the same time, daunted by my new role. Jean Stewart, our previous chairman, was in every way qualified for the post as she has great skills not only with regard to her knowledge of flora and fauna, but in her warmth towards, and understanding of, people. She held the post for six years and during that time was an enthusiastic, hardworking and inspiring figure. We are very fortunate that she is remaining as reserves convener for Fife and Kinross and also has a further year to serve on the Scottish Wildlife Trust council.*

*During her chairmanship Jean was ably supported by her husband Donald. Sadly, following a short illness, Donald died in December. His loss will be deeply felt by all who knew him.*

*I also have to report that June Johnson, who will have been known to many of you, has died recently.*

*Many of you will not yet know me as I only moved to Crail from Cambuslang, near Glasgow, four years ago. Prior to my retirement I was a general medical practitioner in Rutherglen and apart from dog walking had little time for enjoying the*

*countryside. As a medical student in St Andrews and then Dundee I grew to love this part of Scotland and am very happy to have been able to return to live here.*

*Through the University of St Andrews Open Association I enrolled in a "birdwatching for beginners" class led by Jean Stewart. Thus began my education in the realms of natural history and especially birdwatching. No outing is now possible without a pair of binoculars around my neck. It was my further good fortune to be introduced to the Scottish Wildlife Trust by my friend Vi Shannon and to make many more friendships through a shared interest in wildlife.*

*Daphne Eadington and Bidy Gray have arranged a very full and interesting programme for the coming year. I hope that many of you will attend and enjoy these outings and meetings, which are taking place in different venues across our area. I trust that there will be at least one near you.*

*I look forward to meeting and getting to know as many of you as possible in the coming year.*

*Elizabeth Adams*

## SPRING RETURNS TO CULLALOE

It won't be long now till the migrants return from their wintering grounds in Africa to breed in Fife, and Cullaloe will be no exception. Most notably, we will have the return of the warblers to the Reserve. 2007 was a good year for warblers when we had successful breeding of whitethroat, sedge warbler and willow warbler along with sightings of several other warbler species.

The sedge warblers seemed to love the old filter beds and were quite often seen hanging from the grasses at the edge. Some great sights, without even leaving the car park! They were frequently joined both there and on the loch itself by the breeding reed buntings. The whitethroat favoured the bushes near the path to the screen, regularly giving good views as they hopped from branch to branch in search of insects, with juveniles begging food from the adults. Chiffchaff, blackcap and grasshopper warbler were also regularly seen or heard. At times, the Reserve is positively alive with singing birds: whether it's the warblers singing from the willow scrub, or the song thrush singing from the tops of the trees, the noise is a joy to hear.

The wildfowl too will be making their nesting preparations soon. 2007 saw successful breeding of coot, moorhen, mallard and the resident mute swans on the main loch, the swans successfully raising three cygnets. The birds are happy to make their preparations within good sight of the screen, giving great views all spring and summer of the whole

breeding cycle. In fact, the coots continued to build their nests right up until the middle of August. With several sightings of Kingfisher in 2007, who knows, maybe they will be more frequently seen this year? If so, it would be truly amazing. I can't think of a more colourful, attractive bird.

Thanks to the addition of several seed and peanut feeders, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, chaffinch and even great spotted woodpeckers have become regulars, sometimes with as many as 20 birds seen on or around the feeders at one time. We hope to see more finches using new feeders planned closer to the car park.

It isn't just birds that can be seen on the Reserve during spring and summer, though. Damselflies and dragonflies can be found, as well as several species of butterfly, from small copper and peacock to common blue and large green fritillary.

*Grahame Boath*

***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.***

## We greatly regret to report the recent deaths of these dedicated and longstanding activists of Fife and Kinross Members Centre

### JUNE JOHNSON

June joined the Trust in 1977, followed by 30 years of quiet, effective help, not only for the Trust but also for East Fife Organic Gardeners, Fife Museum and many others.

In the early days of Fife Branch, we had fundraising days at different properties, kindly permitted by the owners. June was there, selling ice creams, serving teas, baking delicious biscuits, running the treasure map (which she had painted), all with a cheerful willingness.

We welcomed June's help at the Trust's tent at the Fife Show: instead of feeling cold and tired, we were soon joking and laughing. She was there at tree-planting, on walks to list species, at the roadside verge survey and latterly at Fleecefaulds, pulling thistles with her usual spirit.

June was part of the Branch sub-committee for Promotion and Education and was involved in setting up the local WATCH group. She helped on the Conference organising committee in St Andrews 1994 and drew the attractive illustrations on the programmes. She drew a special "hedgehog" tile for SWT sales in collaboration with Grizelda Hill Pottery, and arranged a Fife Branch Christmas card for several years.

Recently, June was not so able, but continued to help when she could. She had a wonderful garden, planted to attract wildlife. The nursery schoolchildren were brought to see her frogs (which were nearly tame) and other delights. She encouraged their interest, hoping it would develop into a lifelong enjoyment of the natural world.

June leaves a huge gap, not only in her family, to whom we give sincere sympathy, but also in many people's lives, especially in Ceres. To paraphrase Sir Walter Scott: "But search the land of living men, where wilt thou find her like again?"

*Carol Spragge*

### DONALD STEWART

Donald was a member and active supporter of the Scottish Wildlife Trust for many years, and he brought his wide-ranging talents to bear during the six years that Jean, his wife, was Chairman of this Members Centre.

In leading memorable outings for the Members Centre jointly with Jean, Donald was always good-humoured, patient and keen to share his expertise – and his advantageously high telescope - with all comers, novices and experts alike.

Was someone needed to take the door money at a coffee morning? To set up the slide projector? To greet a visiting speaker? To drive members to a meeting? To carry boxes of jumble? Whatever the task, great or small, Donald was there, quiet, competent, witty and unfailingly courteous.

Donald's knowledge of birds was extensive, but he was very modest about it. He was renowned amongst his fellow ornithologists for his fantastic ear for birdsong and his skill in locating and identifying unusual species. His numerous birding interests included counting waders for the British Trust for Ornithology Wetland Bird Survey (at Tentsmuir Point and in all weathers), and Chairmanship of the St Andrews Branch of the Scottish Ornithologists Club.

Donald brought to all he did the thoroughness and meticulous attention to detail which had distinguished him during his career as a senior administrator at St Andrews University (though he did desert his desk one spring when a peregrine falcon nested in St Salvator's Tower, and Donald could be seen patrolling the area with his binoculars, warning off any of the bird's potential foes!). His great passion was to take Jean on strenuous birdwatching holidays in far-flung places and to delight friends with his excellent slides afterwards.

Our Members Centre will miss Donald greatly, and we extend our deepest sympathy to Jean and to his stepfamily.

*Sonia Daniels*

## RESERVES MANAGER'S UPDATE

Last summer, I took over as the Trust's Reserves Manager for East Central, an area which covers Fife, as well as Clackmannanshire and Falkirk. With a total of eighteen sites, eleven of which are in Fife, this is an interesting and challenging post. I hope to put my experience of working on nature reserves with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Ranger Service to good use, and am looking forward to working with conveners and members in the coming year.

I have spent the first few months getting to know my new sites. Fife is lucky to have a fantastic range of reserves, from the botanically-rich meadows of Fleecefaulds, to the dunes of Dumbarrie and the raised bog of Bankhead Moss.

Work has been on-going on many reserves over the past summer, much of which has been carried out by our conservation teams led by David Blair and Will Parsons. They have done a great job - the meadows at Cullaloe and Carlingnose have been cut, more timber has been extracted from Bankhead Moss, and the ever-recalcitrant thistles at Lielowan have been cut back. The conservation teams enable us to carry out a huge amount of work on our reserves that we

wouldn't otherwise get done, and are a great asset to the Trust. They are also a friendly bunch, so if you see them out and about on the reserves, say hello!

I have also been getting to know all the reserve conveners, who have been very welcoming and helpful in getting me up to speed with what has been happening. I am now in the process of putting together work plans for the coming financial year, and will be working with conveners to agree what work should be carried out on their reserves.

Another aspect of my role is to line manage our flying flock shepherds, Tim Brain and Laura Cunningham, and to oversee the grazing project. The flock is improving our grassland sites and hopefully bringing them into favourable condition. I am keen to undertake a programme of grassland monitoring in 2008, so we can assess the impact of the flock and monitor changes from year to year.

I hope you will have the chance to visit some of your nature reserves over the coming seasons, and I look forward to meeting and working with you all.

*Alistair Whyte*

## MOTH TRAPPING FOR NEW FATHERS

I am a relative newcomer to trapping moths in the garden, having started in summer 2005, just before Andrew was born. These facts are related – a birding friend recommended garden “mothing” as a very good activity for new fathers. One gets some of the same pleasures as birding without having to leave home. Of course we are fortunate in also being able to watch birds without leaving home, but that’s another story.

There are various types of moth trap available, and my choice was influenced by our very long driveway. In order to sample all the habitats on offer I have a trap with a low wattage fluorescent tube powered by a 12V motorcycle battery. This attracts fewer moths than a mercury vapour lamp, but is more portable. At first I only tried to identify the so-called “macro-moths” which are well covered by an excellent field guide by Waring and Townsend, illustrated by Richard Lewington, but I soon took up the challenge of identifying the “micros” as well. In this case the internet and a digital camera with a good macro capability are very useful. I tend to run the trap throughout the night as various species fly at different times. I usually trap at weekends and on other nights with good weather conditions (overcast, warm and still). Having recorded the moths I release them the following evening so they are less likely to be eaten by birds.

I generally start the year’s trapping in early April, though a few species are on the wing during the winter months. The most obvious species in April are the members of the genus *Orthosia* – Hebrew character, common quaker, clouded drab

etc. These generally occur in good numbers, with a few early grey also putting in an appearance, and continue into May.

Variety really starts to increase in June and some wonderfully named species turn up: pale-shouldered brocade, rustic shoulder-knot, shoulder-striped wainscot, heart and dart. Of course hawkmoths are one of the main prizes for any beginner, though few species are regular in Scotland. Poplar hawkmoths, with their curious resting posture with the hind wings held in front of the fore wings, are reasonably common with us but I have only trapped a single elephant hawkmoth. Another very striking moth that is reasonably common here is the garden tiger – this year was particularly good for them. In July and August the large yellow underwing becomes very common – and the bane of mothing since they tend to be very lively and disturb other species in the trap.

Among my favourite groups are the plusias, including such beautiful species as gold spangle, beautiful golden Y, burnished brass and the spectacle. Among the plusias is the silver Y, one of a number of migrants from the continent that are common visitors to Britain.

2006 was a particularly good year for migrant moths, whilst 2007 was very poor. Now I can look forward to what the new season may bring - and perhaps identify some more of those micros...

*Rob Armstrong*

## CONSERVATION GRAZING PROJECT AT AUCHTERMUCHTY COMMON

Auchtermuchty Common is an area of roughly 15 hectares fragmented into a number of sites to the North and East of the village. The Common was formally granted to the people of Auchtermuchty in the 1970s by the then Town Council and has since been managed by the MacDuff Trust who are elected from the local community.

The Conservation Grazing Project focuses on the largest section of the Common – the Whitefield which is considered to be most valuable in terms of its biodiversity. The Whitefield has seen many changes over the years; it was ploughed for growing tatties and barley during the second world war, has been set alight regularly since and may soon be overlooked by wind turbines and sea eagles !

In terms of biodiversity the Whitefield represents a fragment of the 5% of species rich grassland that remains in Scotland from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It is home to grey partridges, skylarks, stonechats, yellowhammers, brown hare, stoats and roe deer. In spring the grassland is rich with dog violets, the food plants of two of the 15 species of butterfly recorded here: the small pearl-bordered and dark green fritillary. Recent management with the help of Fife Coast and Countryside Trust Rangers and a core group of around 30 volunteers has resulted in Early Purple Orchid numbers increasing from 32 spikes in 2005 to 202 in 2007. Summer visitors to the Common are welcomed by an array of toadflax, yellow rattle, knapweed, scabious and burnet saxifrage.

Unfortunately, as the Whitefield has not been grazed for at least 50 years it is now turning to scrub despite our best efforts. Advice from numerous sources consistently identified grazing as the best possible management option. In 2005 the Trust consulted all residents of ‘Muchty by leafleting and an open meeting and received overwhelming support for grazing. The next step was to source funds for renewing the

infrastructure needed to graze the Common i.e. walls, fences, gates. The Trust has been successful in the past year in securing sufficient funds from Fife Council, Fife Environment Trust and Big Lottery Breathing Places which will enable us to take the project forward. The Breathing Places Fund also gives us resources for leaflets and interpretation boards (essential for letting people know what the project is about) and volunteer training in botanical monitoring and stock management. Some funds are still required but we’re well on our way.

Ultimately the desired outcome is to save the valuable plant and animal communities that the Whitefield supports for the people of ‘Muchty and the wider community. A monitoring regime has been put in place to track the effects of grazing on the site. The MacDuff Trust also seeks to involve people actively in the project by running regular volunteer action days and training sessions, moth nights, easter egg hunts etc. We recognise that access issues may arise as regular users of the site are unaccustomed to sharing it with stock. However, we hope to address this by grazing for only part of the year and within enclosed areas.

Already the drystone boundary wall has been repaired, the fences start work soon and we have been liaising with potential grazers including SWT’s own Flying Flock and the Eriskay Pony Society. Things are moving on apace and I would encourage all to become regular visitors to enjoy the Common and watch our Project progress.

Thanks to all who have helped us to date.

*Kate Morison, MacDuff (Auchtermuchty) Trustee and  
Fife Coast & Countryside Trust Ranger*



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



# FIFE & KINROSS MC PROGRAMME FOR SUMMER 2008

## 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 Daphne Eadington, 01337 831175, email [daphne@eadingtond.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:daphne@eadingtond.freereserve.co.uk)*

*To receive email reminders and updates about changes to the programme, including notice of additional events, email Daphne 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 an admission charge of £2 for all indoor events, to help defray the costs*

### APRIL

#### Coastal walk at Kilminning

Saturday 12 April, 14.00. Meet at Kilminning car park (NO 631 087)

Early spring flowers, birds of coast and shore. Contact Elizabeth Adams 01333 450 267.

#### Sea Eagles in Fife

Thursday 24 April, 19.30, Village Inn, Pitlessie

Clare Smith, RSPB, will talk on the reintroduction of this large raptor to NE Scotland. Contact Daphne Eadington 01337 831 175

### MAY

#### Wood and farmland walk at Prior Wells

Sunday 11 May, 14.00, meet at Balmerino Abbey (NO 358 246)

Wild Hyacinths, nesting birds and splendid Tayside views, led by Harry Lawson, contact 01382 330 277.

#### Walk in Dura Den

Sunday 25 May, 14.00, meet Dura Den Car park (NO 416 150)

Look at plants, geology and geomorphology, with Richard Batchelor. Contact Biddy Gray 01592 752 372.

### JUNE

#### Wildlife Week walk on Auchtermuchty Common

Sunday 8 June, 14.00, Meet at car park at north end of common on east side of B936 approx 1 mile north of Auchtermuchty (NO 238135).

See flowers, birds and insects, led by Kate Morison, Fife Ranger, contact 01337 828 058.

#### Wildlife Week Visit to Jupiter Urban Wildlife Centre, Grangemouth

Saturday 14 June, 14.00. From Beancross Road, Grangemouth, turn north onto Newlands Road, then left onto Newhouse Road, left onto Wood Street, and Jupiter is on your right

Joint visit with the Pitcairn Society, led by Stephen Owen, Jupiter Ranger, contact 01324 486 475.

#### A mid-summer evening at Fleecefaulds Meadow

Friday 27 June, 20.30, meet at Reserve car park near Ceres (NO 402 087)

See orchids and moths, led by Tim Brain, contact 01557 840 317.

### JULY

#### Walk on the Lomond Hills

Saturday 5 July, 14.00, meet East Lomond car park (NO 251 059)

Visit the Lime Kilns area to see the plants linked to this special habitat, led by Bob Weston, Fife Ranger. Contact Daphne Eadington 01337 831 175.

#### Coastal Walk from Kirkcaldy to Seafeld Tower

Sunday, 27 July, 14.00, meet Seafeld car park (NT 277 890)

See seals, birds, flora and fossils, led by Tom and Biddy Gray. Contact Biddy 01592 752 372.

### AUGUST

#### Late Summer at Fleecefaulds Meadow

Sunday 10 August, 14.00, meet 20.30 at Reserve car park near Ceres (NO 402 087)

See flowers and butterflies, led by Alison Irvine, contact 01337 830 366.

### SEPTEMBER

#### Autumn Woodland Walk, Pitmedden Forest

Saturday 20 September, 14.00, meet at the Clink car park (NO 222 128), Pitmedden Forest, by Auchtermuchty,

Lomond views and wonderful autumn colours, plus fungal foray, led by Kate Morison, Fife Ranger, contact 01337 828 058.

### MORE ABOUT MOTHS

*If you enjoyed Rob Armstrong's article and are interested in becoming more involved in mothing, please note that the new Moth Recorder for Fife is Duncan Davidson, email [Duncan@dwwd.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:Duncan@dwwd.freereserve.co.uk), tel 013383 730 446 (home).*

### 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 (TAPIFEIC) [formerly FERN]** Simon Scott, 01592 413550, email [simon.scott@fife.gov.uk](mailto:simon.scott@fife.gov.uk)

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