

The newsletter of the



Fife Area Wildlife News

Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust



No 74 Autumn 2008

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

As I am sitting down to write this, our programme for the autumn has just been settled and I have been thinking of the speakers who have entertained and educated me during this last year.

We have had a very interesting series of talks including one on the release locally of young sea eagles. This was held at Pitlessie Village Inn and, as more than seventy people attended, it was difficult to find seats for everyone. I sincerely hope that this will be a problem that recurs during our next years programme! As you look at the talks and outings proposed perhaps you will have thoughts on subjects or speakers for future events and I would be very happy to hear from anyone about this.

Some of you may be aware that Bonkers in Market Street, St Andrews has been selling green shopping bags over the past eighteen months. You may not know, however, that the profit from the sale of these bags has been generously donated to Scottish Wildlife

Trust. It was decided that a small proportion of these funds would be used to introduce some children to the delights of mini-monster hunting, creating natural collages and identifying mystery objects in boxes. To that end we held an event in Cockshaugh Park, Lade Braes during the Easter holidays and had a very successful and enjoyable day not only for the children but also their parents. My thanks must go to the countryside ranger and a very able group of SWT members who helped run it. We hope to have further activities for children during the coming months and also to repeat the Easter event next year.

As with many organisations, the more people who are actively involved the easier it is to keep the demands on any one person's time to a level that is both enjoyable and sustainable. To that end I would urge any of you who feel you could become involved to get in touch with me. The tasks are varied and as with the childrens' day out can be enjoyable for everyone.

Elizabeth Adams

ARMCHAIR ETYMOLOGY

Those of us who take a special interest in insects tend to welcome their relative scarcity in winter as an opportunity to attempt identification of problem specimens from the previous summer and to catch up on some relevant reading. However last winter my reading was interrupted by an irruption of insect life in the sitting room, at times even making it unnecessary to rise from my armchair to collect a sample. The source turned out to be a stack of logs kept in a recess beside the fireplace. The stack was last replenished from the outdoor wood-shed in January and had not been used since. First to appear were small black wasps, usually crawling lethargically across the carpet, beginning in early February and continuing, about one every two or three days, for the next two months, 24 in all. Identification might have been difficult but for a happy accident. Last summer I had a visit from a specialist in bees and wasps. We found one small black wasp drowned in a water-filled leaf-base of teasel growing alongside the wood-shed: identified as *Pemphredon lugubris*, a species that burrows into rotting wood to lay eggs and then feeds the resulting larvae on aphids. A comparison showed that the sitting room wasps were indeed the same.

Then on 9th March, instead of a little black wasp there appeared a glittering jewel – a ruby-tailed wasp, resplendent in sparkling metallic green with the

abdomen a brilliant orange, bronze or purple depending upon the angle of the light. Most ruby-tails are parasitic on other wasps and bees and it transpired that this one, *Pseudomalus ornatus*, had been recorded attacking *Pemphredon* wasps.

But it didn't stop there. Between mid-March and mid-April four female ichneumon wasps appeared in the sitting room, extraordinary insects with ovipositors longer than themselves with which to penetrate wood and lay eggs in insect larvae deep within. This species (one of more than 3000 species of ichneumon known in the British Isles!) has been suspected of parasitising *Pemphredon* wasps, so was probably part of the same food web. The final player in this cryptic theatre appeared on 22nd April in the form of a little black and orange hover-fly, *Xylota segnis*, whose larvae also live in dead wood, but feeding on the wood, or more likely on the associated fungi.

It's perhaps just as well that April was so cold and windy that little was flying outside to distract me.

Gordon Corbet

WELCOME to all 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.

RESERVES MANAGER'S UPDATE

Summer is almost over, but our wildlife reserves here in Fife are all still well worth a visit. Why not spend an afternoon at Bankhead Moss, looking at the bog restoration work which is ongoing here, and perhaps trying to identify some of the sphagnum that can be found on the bog surface. Or visit Cullaloe – we will be dropping the water level in the autumn, which will expose bare mud and hopefully attract a variety of interesting waders.

Over the last few months we have been working on a number of projects on reserves in Fife. We have been undertaking a programme of coppicing at Cullaloe, to vary the structure of the willow on the bed of the old reservoir. This is an important project as Cullaloe is an exceptional site for warblers, which rely on this scrub habitat. Also at Cullaloe, this summer will hopefully see the re-construction of the spillway which flows from the reservoir. Visitors will have noticed the erosion and damage to the spillway – this is a problem which will only get worse unless we take action now.

As well as regular works on reserves, David Blair and his conservation team had to spend much time repairing damage after the winter storms. They also had to spend some time repairing damage caused by vandalism at Dumbarnie. Fife is fortunate in having much lower rates of vandalism than some of the other areas I manage, but we should all be vigilant in trying to eradicate this behaviour. I would encourage anyone seeing any suspicious behaviour on a reserve to call the police, and also to get in touch with me.

There are a range of other exciting projects proposed and being discussed. I am always keen to hear from members who would be interested in helping out on reserves, particularly with survey or monitoring work, or who would like to help with the flying flock as a volunteer shepherd. If you would like any further information on any of our reserves, or would like to get more involved with looking after them, please get in touch.

Alistair Whyte

(Alistair reports on Bankhead Moss Reserve below. We hope to report on other reserves in future issues—Ed)

BANKHEAD MOSS—RESTORATION

Raised bogs are renowned throughout the world for their unique ecology, hydrology and species. Fife contains an example of this most rare and threatened, but fascinating, habitat at Bankhead Moss SWT reserve. Bankhead Moss demonstrates a typical dome shape, which can best be appreciated when entering the reserve from the north. The depth of peat in the centre of the bog is around seven metres (about one and a half double decker buses), and a range of specialised plants can be found on the bog surface. These include bog asphodel, round-leaved sundew and twelve species of sphagnum.

However, the bog is under threat. Due to past cutting and drainage, the bog has started to dry out, and is being invaded by birch scrub. If we were to allow this process to continue unchecked, we would be left with a birch woodland and would lose one of the rarest habitats in Fife, along with its associated species.

This is why SWT has been taking action to restore the bog to its former glory over the last few years. This has involved removing invasive birch and scots pine from the surface of the bog, damming up drainage ditches to raise the water table, and introducing grazing onto the site to reduce the level of birch regeneration.

We are at a stage now when we are assessing the success of this management and are looking at future options. Discussions with SNH have led us to make some changes to the management regime, which members might notice if they visit the site over the next year. No sheep will be present on the site this year. The grazing has been successful in tackling the birch regeneration, but we are keen to prevent any erosion causing loss of peat. Therefore, grazing will be stopped for a year, then next year the sheep will be introduced back to the site, but in a restricted area to allow us to better target the birch. We also plan to carry out an experimental heather burn on a small section of the bog over the coming winter. This will be a controlled burn carried out by our conservation team, to see whether this rejuvenates the condition of the heather the bog.

We will review this management over the course of 2009. Visitors are, as always, welcome to the reserve, to enjoy the raised bog and its plants, or to birdwatch from the hides overlooking the scrapes and pools to the west.

Alistair Whyte

CATERPILLAR MAULS OLD LADY

Well, not quite! In February I received a phone call from an elderly lady living nearby: "I've been bitten on the leg by something like a caterpillar, an inch long – what could it be?" What indeed? Caterpillars don't bite people. The victim arrived with the culprit in a sealed envelope. I expected a squashed mess, but no – it was alive and well, and was indeed a caterpillar. I tentatively identified it as that of a noctuid moth, of which there are many. The obvious solution to the puzzle was to try to rear the moth, but since the crime had been committed indoors, what to feed it? "Try lettuce", my friendly lepidopterist suggested. So I did, and it tucked in avidly for the next few days before spinning a slight cocoon and pupating. Then on 30th March a rather undistinguished brown moth emerged, with a

wing-span of about 35 mm. It turned out to be a Scarce bordered straw (*Helicoverpa armigera*), which is a common agricultural pest in Mediterranean countries, reaching the south of England as an immigrant most years but only rarely getting as far as Scotland – including singles at Dunfermline and Guardbridge in 2006. However caterpillars are liable to arrive on imported fruit and veg. The only clue as to their lady-eating behaviour is that when the caterpillars are kept together they are reputed to become cannibals! So remember to wear your suit of armour next time you go to the supermarket!

Gordon Corbet

PS Any records of moths would be welcome by Duncan Davidson, moth recorder for Fife: Duncan@dwwd.freereserve.co.uk; 01383 730446 (home).

DIGISCOPING: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

This article is written for those with no prior knowledge of digiscoping, so I crave the indulgence of all you experts out there who probably know much more than I do!

Digiscoping is a relatively new phenomenon, made possible by the availability of a plethora of digital cameras, many of which can be used with a telescope to capture images of wildlife, instead of a conventional telephoto lens.

Digiscoping brings several advantages to wildlife observation. It provides a visual record of sightings along with the date and time which are recorded at the same time as the photograph. Many digital cameras also have the facility for addition to each image of a voice commentary which can include the weather conditions, location etc. Capturing a photo of your quarry can also be a great aid to identification since you then have the luxury of being able to consult guides at leisure on return from an expedition.

What kit will you need? In addition to camera and telescope you will need some kind of adapter to mount the camera close to the eyepiece of the telescope. Unfortunately, not all camera/telescope combinations work satisfactorily and so some trial and error may be involved. As far as camera type is concerned, several compact digital cameras work well (most of the Samsung range and Nikon Coolpix series, for example). Most digital SLR cameras also work well, provided the right kind of adapter, in the form of a tube to connect the eyepiece of the telescope to the lens of the camera, is available. Telescope manufacturers like Swarovski

make special (and expensive!) adapters to fit their specific range of telescopes. These are either the connecting tube type referred to above, or a special mount which holds the camera out of the way while using the telescope's eyepiece but allows it to be swung into position when you are ready to take a photograph. If all this sounds too complicated, to make things easy, several manufacturers, such as Nikon, sell kits with compatible telescope, adapter and camera.

I have had success using a Swarovski 80HD scope with both a Samsung L100 compact camera and a Nikon D40X SLR.

A couple of operational tips are in order here. Once you have your camera and telescope set up, you will need to experiment with the zoom settings on your camera lens. Generally speaking a wide angle setting is needed to avoid the phenomenon of "vignetting" where the image is framed by a black circular border. Another problem, which can lead to blurred images, is vibration which can occur when operating the camera manually, no matter how stable your tripod. To overcome this, many manufacturers sell a wireless remote shutter release.

In summary, digiscoping is a great way of identifying and keeping records of your wildlife sightings. Although the quality of the photos you obtain can be very good, for really top-quality, publishable pictures you will have to invest in an expensive telephoto lens and a digital SLR camera. Happy hunting!

Ian Hunter

KINCRAIG POINT, ELIE

For the geologist, botanist and ornithologist Kincaig point is well worth a visit. It is best approached from Earlsferry, along West Bay beach. One can either tackle the "chain walk" along the cliff base if the tide is out or along the cliff top. Kincaig is a large volcanic neck, formed some 320 million years ago as an eruption of magma into carboniferous sedimentary deposits. The rock is composed of bedded tuffs, agglomerates, alkali-basaltic columns and pyroclastic intrusions. As the sea has eroded the neck, wave cut platforms are seen and the rocks are well exposed. Veins and dykes of tuffisite and baryte are visible. Along the margins of the neck and areas exposed at low tide, the underlying sedimentary rocks (sandstones, shales, ironstones, coal) of the Carboniferous limestone coal group are seen. On the shore before the cliffs, pyroclastic bombs lie among the large variety of sea polished rocks of Grampian origin deposited after the last Ice Age. Further along at Ruddons Point, nodules of olivine, feldspar, chrome ore, magnetite and biotite are seen.

Kincaig Point has three caves the largest of which is MacDuffs cave, the roof of which has collapsed over time to expose sheltered rock faces that provide nesting sites for seabirds. Beware diving Fulmars! Further west are two other caves, one of which is sometimes called "Smugglers cave" as it has a sea channel carved into the wave platform suitable for a small boat! Sitting on the rocks

watching the variety of sea birds, then turning around to see inland birds amongst the scrub is a bird watcher's dream.

Kincaig is also a botanist's haven, though to explore the steep slopes one must have mountain goat feet. On the Eastern slopes away from the cliff face is undisturbed grassland. Raised beaches provide a calcareous component thus allowing a profusion of plant species. In spring one can admire primroses, cowslips, thrift and one of the largest displays of bloody cranesbills anywhere in Fife. Later on, rock rose, vipers bugloss, bell heather, ladies bedstraw appear to name but a few. Nestled at the foot of the cliff beyond MacDuffs cave is a good display of sea kale but you will need to negotiate the chain walk to see it. For the entomologist, there is a colony of Northern Brown Argus whose food plant is rock rose.

I make a point of visiting Kincaig each year for a day and there is always something new to see. And once the day is done you can retire to the Ship Inn in Elie, and then walk the adjacent Ruby Bay hoping to find a ruby - but don't get excited, they are really garnets from a mineral vein under the sea that as yet has not been discovered. Fancy a scuba dive next year?

Kincaig Point: Ordnance Survey sheet 59, grid ref 456995

Jamie Lyall

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



FIFE & KINROSS MC PROGRAMME FOR AUTUMN-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.freeseve.co.uk

To receive email reminders and updates about changes to the programme, including notice of additional events, email Elizabeth Adams at philcana1@btinternet.com and she'll add you to her list.

For outdoor events sturdy footwear and suitable clothing are advised.

There will be an admission charge of £2 for indoor events to defray costs unless otherwise stated.

AUGUST

Late Summer at Fleecefaulds Meadow

Sunday, 10 August, 2 pm, meet at Reserve car park near Ceres (NO 402 087)

Alison Irvine, Reserve Convener, will lead a walk to look at the magnificent butterflies and the abundant wild flowers found at SWT's Fleecefaulds Reserve in late summer. Contact Alison 01337 830 366.

SEPTEMBER

Loch Leven and the River Leven – a landscape transformed

Thursday 18th September, 7.30 pm, St Bryce Kirk Centre, St Brycedale Avenue, Kirkcaldy

Dr David Munro, historical geographer, has a life-long interest in this area and will give an illustrated talk on the history of the landscape. Contact Bidy Gray 01592 752372.

Autumn Walk, Pitmedden Forest, with a Fungal Foray

Saturday 20 September, 2 pm, meet at the Clink car park, Pitmedden (NO 222 128).

Beautiful autumn woodland walk, with Lomond views, led by Kate Morison, Fife Ranger, contact 01337 828058.

National AGM and Members Day

Saturday 27 September, Dewars Centre, Perth.

A great day out, with a chance to meet fellow SWT members from all over Scotland. Full details in "Scottish Wildlife" Magazine.

OCTOBER

Moths – myths and magic

Monday 13 October, 7.30 pm, Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd Cupar.

Duncan Davidson, Moth Recorder for Fife, will share experiences of watching and photographing moths in Dunfermline and around Fife. Contact Daphne Eadington on 01337 831175.

NOVEMBER

Members Centre AGM and talk "Wild Flowers in the History of Medicine"

Thursday 6 November, 7.30 pm, Lomond Centre, Glenrothes.

The Members Centre AGM will be followed by a lavishly illustrated talk by Roy Sexton of Stirling Members Centre. No admission charge.

DECEMBER

Return of the Beaver

Tuesday 9 December, 7.30 pm, Town Hall, St Andrews

A talk on these once-native mammals, including their skills in engineering and managing wetlands, by Simon Jones of SWT.

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Articles, news, snippets from contributors both old and new will be welcome. Please contact me to discuss your ideas.

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