



Fife Area Wildlife News

The newsletter of the

Fife and Kinross Members Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust

No 75 Winter 2008 Spring 2009



CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Good communication is a very important aspect of any organisation. In order to try to achieve this it is helpful to have your email address. This allows me to contact you about our own events and also other events which may interest you. These email addresses are used when I send out a bulk mailing and are sent as blind copies. If you would like me to add your email address to my list for inclusion in future mailings, please send it to me at philcana1@btinternet.com. These communications are kept to a minimum as I have no wish to overload your system! It is also a problem that some messages are bouncing back to me so the email address may have changed. If you have recently changed your address and wish to be reinstated, please let me know.

We have had two further children's events this summer at Kinkell Braes Caravan Park. The activities were a colouring/drawing competition, a tray memory test and a mini-beast hunt in litter. As these were well received, I am continuing to have some events which are child orientated. If anyone has ideas about future activities or would like to contribute to such an event please contact me.

I hope that over the summer and autumn you have enjoyed our outings. We are very fortunate here in Fife to have a number of members who are able to make every outing an adventure due to their ability to identify fossils, plants, insects and birds. Recently on a very wet evening trapping and identifying moths I found out about a whole new and fascinating world. The moths when seen closely were very diverse in markings and colourings and were quite exceptionally beautiful. So much so that I forgot about the rain and cold and only the lateness of the hour made us give up our search. Tim Brain, one of the conservation shepherds, and Gordon Corbet were our two experts and made the whole experience truly memorable. Further mothing expeditions are now definitely on my list of things to do again but hopefully minus the rain.

Now with a good programme of indoor events in prospect, learning new and interesting facts is set to continue. Once again these talks are at venues around Fife and Kinross and so there should be some not too far from you. Of course I will be delighted if you are able to come to all of them!

Elizabeth Adams

MID SUMMER COLOURS ON EAST LOMOND

It was cool and grey, but not raining, as we sat near the masts on East Lomond on a Sunday in July. We were looking out for the short-eared owl sometimes seen on daylight patrol, often pursued by carrion crows. Buzzard and kestrel were hunting the slopes, but no sign of the owl.

Bob Weston and Kate Morison from the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust took us along the south-westerly track to the lime kilns area, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI). The way was fringed with the summer flowers of acid grassland - tormentil, birdsfoot trefoil, lady's mantle, silverweed and heath bedstraw. Heather was beginning to colour the hillside - so early this year. Several small moths were seen, like delicate honey-gold lace, and one was caught, examined and photographed. Tom Gray and Gordon Corbet identified them as Northern Spinach moths.

Small birds were very active over the fields, on the heather slopes and in the gorse; we saw and heard linnets, enjoyed the skylarks' continuous song, and admired the elaborate parachuting displays of the meadow pipits. Stonechats flew ahead of us, perching briefly on the fence wires.

A red grouse called "Go back, go back", as we turned through the gate into the Lime Kilns area. Different flowers were growing on this more alkaline soil, including some late dark purple orchid spikes, bright lemon yellow mouse ear, and a tall golden hawkweed. Ringlet butterflies were busy amongst the subtle pinkish tapestry of the tall grass flowers. Further down, around the lime-rich pools, the flowers were especially pretty, with swathes of ragged robin, forget-me-not, heath and marsh bedstraw, masses of water avens, and marsh cinquefoil. Even stony parts of the path had large patches of bright purple mountain thyme.

Thanks to Bob and Kate for leading such a rewarding walk for us, and sharing their detailed knowledge of this lovely area. July must be the best time of year to try to get a handle on grass identification, and the flowers were a special treat.

Daphne Eadington

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

It is always important when carrying out a large-scale project to be able to evaluate it properly, and to judge whether it is having a real impact. One such enterprise is the SWT Flying Flocks project, where we use our own flock of sheep to graze grassland reserves, largely in Fife, to maintain and enhance their biodiversity. Many of these reserves are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and we have a duty to keep them in 'favourable condition'.

During summer of 2008, we undertook an evaluation of the Flying Flock project. Ben Averis, an independent ecologist and botanist, carried out an in-depth survey on the grazed reserves in Fife, comparing the data to the results from similar surveys carried out in the past. The reserves were surveyed using quadrat monitoring, where random quadrats are analysed for species content and condition of the vegetation, and site condition monitoring, which assesses the condition of the whole reserve.

The results were very favourable, and indicate that the flying flocks project is having a very beneficial impact on our reserves. The condition of the grasslands is improving significantly, with the sheep helping to keep the ranker, coarser grasses in check, allowing floristic diversity. The timing of when we put sheep on and take them off sites is very important, and having our own flock gives us this flexibility. We will be looking to continue the project and to expand and develop it over the next few years.

Other management has been taking place on the reserves over recent months as well. We now have a new spillway at Cullaloe, designed to minimise erosion. We will also be installing a new viewing screen at Cullaloe to replace the current one, which is nearing the end of its life. David Blair and his conservation team have been undertaking practical management on the reserves, such as grass cutting at Carlingnose and Cullaloe and scrub clearance at Fleecefaulds. Jean Stewart has been leading a team of volunteers tackling birch regeneration at Bankhead Moss.

Many thanks to everyone who has been helping on our reserves. If you would like to get involved or would like to find out more about reserve management, please do not hesitate to contact me, tel 01236 617115 or email awhyte@swt.org.uk.

Alistair Whyte

NEWS FROM CARLINGNOSE

Management of this reserve is all about maintaining the grassland. At least 20 bags of gorse, cotoneaster, dog rose and hawthorn have been removed from the open area between the quarry and the headland. More serious cutting back will be undertaken in the autumn. Most of the plants whose presence is the basic reason that the reserve exists did well this summer. The bloody cranesbill, lesser meadow rue and kidney vetch provided an excellent display and a small clump of dropwort by the rocky knoll also showed well. Fortunately dropwort is also present in other parts of the reserve and in the grassland to the north of North Queensferry. The field gentian seems to have disappeared along with most of the rabbits which grazed the vegetation to leave a close cropped sward which, it seems, this plant requires. We need a plan to try and re-establish it.

A nice irony has been the use of the derelict pier by several pairs of common terns as a breeding area. A few years ago SWT placed old tyres filled with gravel on the pier to encourage the terns to nest but they hardly gave it a second look. During the winter, person or persons unknown removed the tyres and this year I saw a minimum of 12 young on the pier in July. I don't know how many fledged, but several of the 12 were well grown when I counted them. The other good news on the avian front has been the presence of at least two singing lesser whitethroats. I have heard them for the past few years on the reserve and in other places around the village. Last year was particularly good with birds heard or seen in five places. The common resident birds all seem to have done well and there were also plenty of willow warblers and several chiffchaffs singing in the trees and scrub along the coastal path in May and June.

The fulmars were seen sizing up the quarry face, but they haven't nested this year. Other birds which have been seen regularly on the reserve have been kestrels, buzzards, linnets and, of course plenty of eiders on the sea beneath the point. A pair of ravens has also been seen around North Queensferry over the last two years and they have visited the reserve on a few occasions.

John Done

FIFE NATURE RESTORED

After several years of being rather swamped by other environmental activities in Fife Council, the Fife biological record centre has, since July, undergone a promising revival. Central to this has been the transfer of one post, in the form of Simon Scott, from Fife Council's Environmental Services to the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT) where the ranger service and biodiversity officer are already located. The record centre has also reverted to its original name of *Fife Nature*, or *Fife Nature Record Centre* depending on context, a welcome change from the cumbersome *Take a Pride in Fife Environmental Information Centre*. It is still receiving financial support from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Simon is housed, with some of the rangers, at the Pitcairn Centre in Glenrothes. With the prospect of one half-time assistant, the staffing level is a little short of ideal for the operation of a local record centre, but it is encouraging that the centre is now devoted solely to the collection, storage and dissemination of biological records. A 'Recorder Group' of volunteers, representing the principal sources of

information, has been re-established, one of their tasks being the refereeing of records to ensure control of quality. Apart from providing information to Fife Council's planners, and others involved with the protection of species and sites, one objective will be to update and maintain the 'Nature of Fife' inventory – the annotated list of all species recorded in Fife, which was originally produced by the SWT team responsible for the *Nature of Fife* book published in 1998. Part of the inventory is now easily accessible on a separate Fife Nature website: www.fifenature.co.uk and will gradually be extended and updated.

A new 'Species Recorder' programme is available to enable multiple records to be submitted by computer, but individual records or small batches are welcome in any format or by post. Contact: Simon Scott, Fife Nature, Pitcairn Centre, Moidart Drive, Glenrothes, KY7 6ET; 08451 55 55 55 ext. 440456; Simon.Scott@fife.gov.uk.

Gordon Corbet

EAST SCOTLAND SEA EAGLES

East Scotland Sea Eagles is a five year project (2007-2011) returning white-tailed sea eagles to their former haunts in East Scotland. The project is a partnership between Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Forestry Commission who host the release site.

At the time of writing (end of August) we have just completed our second year of releases and the eight males and seven females are mainly using the food dump and starting to explore their new environment. One wandering male has already headed south near Glenrothes.

This year I helped with chick collection in Norway and experienced how hard won our chicks are as we only collect from nests containing twins, leaving one chick behind: this involves checking a large number of nests spread between Bergen and Alesund. Our first 13 chicks arrived on 20th June into Edinburgh airport and we were able to bring two more females over in July. Due to the logistics involved in each release and the fact that sea eagles are sociable birds, it really maximises our chances of success to bring a minimum of 15 birds over each year. The eaglets are housed in pairs and a trio, matched by size, in specially built aviaries, for two months until old enough to fly. We feed the birds on a diet of fish, venison and rabbit through a small hatch to minimise human contact. Sea eagles are naturally more tolerant of people than

golden eagles, nesting 200m from houses in Norway. As young birds their flight is often floppy and they are slow to flush for the first few weeks; however, it only takes them a couple of weeks to learn to soar.

Last year all birds were independent of the food dump by the end of October, dispersing through the Forth valley, Fife and Perthshire.

Due to licensing issues with wing tags this year, the birds are all fitted with a colour ring on the left leg. This is the 'year code' for the whole of Europe, so the unique two digits on the red band need to be read to determine which bird it is. All birds are fitted with radios with a five year battery life which allows us to follow their movements. Eleven of last year's birds are still alive, currently in Lothian, Loch Tay, Glenalmond, Fife, Forth Valley and Skye. Two birds who went to Mull have returned to Perthshire. Young sea eagles spend their first few years wandering before settling to breed at four or five years old. I can't wait to see when and where birds from the two releases first meet up!

All sightings and any behavioural information greatly appreciated, and thanks to everyone who has reported them. Please report sightings to eastscotlandseaeagles@rspb.org.uk or phone 01738 630 783. More information can be found at www.rspb.org.uk

Claire Smith, RSPB

DIARY OF AN ANCIENT WOOD

This is the first article about an old wood at the back of my cottage. It is marked on a 17th century map. This part is a description of the wood and subsequent articles will describe the wood through the seasons.

The wood is about 14 acres surrounded by cattle pastures and hedgerows. A gully runs through it which was an old cart track carrying coal from the hinterland to the coast; initially used by monks for Inchcolm and Culross, but latterly to supply Lord Elgin's works at Limekilns. The wood has good stands of beech, ash, oak and hawthorn interspersed with birch, holly, sycamore, hazel and elder. Two crab-apple trees thrive. On the edge of the wood is gorse, broom, some bracken, brambles, honeysuckle, foxgloves, cow parsley, hogweed and dog rose, while the under storey has areas of thick leaf mould with bluebells, violets, wood anemone, herb bennet, herb paris and pignut. A variety of grasses appear in lighter parts (meadow, cocksfoot, yorkshire fog, rye and foxtail). The fungi are plentiful but as yet I have not identified them. After prolonged rains, a water spring appears which drains into an adjacent meadow carrying seeds of hope to propagate the wood.

The usual assortment of farm and field birds is resident with regular visitors to the feeder including siskin, blackcaps, pheasants and a woodpecker. Fieldfares appear occasionally, a kestrel hovers and a sparrow hawk speeds past on a low flying mission. Swallows and house martins thrive on the summer insects on the

wood edge and nest in the eaves. Bats circle on summer evenings as a resident barn owl goes hunting. And then we must not forget mammals; field mice abound, mole is active, hedgehog snuffles past, and badger pays a visit. Sadly grey squirrels are a pest and I shoot them (with apologies for the sensitive reader). As to insects, there is a whole new chapter ahead.

The beauty of the wood is that it is not managed and nature is allowed to take its course. There are fallen old monsters, the standing dead with residents, adult specimens in prime of life, juniors striving to get light and saplings trying hard. Cattle use the wood in autumn as a shelter which is probably of overall benefit. The wood is not static and changes as time passes. It is a joy to observe as I walk in it every day.

To whet the appetite for the next article, a sparrowhawk raced through the trees this evening and scattered the small birds at the feeder. The effort was in vain as the Limousin bull in the adjacent field raised an eyebrow and magpies sent out a panic call.

Jamie Lyall

Are you creative on the computer? Could you help freshen up the appearance of FAWN by designing a new masthead? It should include SWT logo and a new image of a fawn. Designs to me please, preferably in Publisher but Word acceptable, by 31st December. A book token for the winner — Ed



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



FIFE & KINROSS MC PROGRAMME FOR WINTER 08 SPRING 09 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

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.*

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 Dr Roy Sexton of Stirling Members Centre of SWT. There will be no admission charge, but £2 for refreshments.

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, SWT Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager.

JANUARY

A walk at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs – to see the over-wintering birds

Sunday 11 January, 2.00 pm, Birnie Loch Car Park (Grid Ref NO 283 126), B937 just south of junction with A91.

Good opportunity to see a wide variety of winter visitors, with Tony Wilson, Ranger, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. Contact Daphne Eadington 01337 831175.

Fascinating Fife – plants, birds and animals on our SWT Reserves

Thursday 29 January, 7.30 pm, St Peter's Episcopal Church Hall, Hope Street, Inverkeithing

Dr Jean Stewart, SWT Reserves Committee Convener for Fife. Jean has many slides and stories of interesting plants, birds and animals readily seen locally.

FEBRUARY

Access to the Countryside in Fife

Monday 23 February, 7.30 pm, St Fillan's Church, Aberdour
Alison Irvine, Access Officer, Fife Council. Alison has expert knowledge of local wildlife, and of the new Core Path network. Hopefully, she can make lots of new "connections" for us.

MARCH

Space, time and tide – an Early Spring Walk beside the Eden Estuary

Saturday 21 March, 1.30 pm, Eden Estuary Centre Car Park, Main Street, Guardbridge

An excellent chance to see waders, winter visitors and other birds of sea and shore, with Ranald Strachan, Ranger, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. Contact Daphne Eadington 01337 831175.

Speaker to be announced

Thursday 26 March, 7.30 pm, Kinross Church Centre, Kinross
Joint meeting with Kinross Camera Club. No admission charge.

APRIL

Children's Outdoor Event

Thursday 16 April, time and venue to be confirmed. Admission by pre-booking at Bonkers, Market St, St Andrews (tel 01334 473919) from 6th April.

There will be various games and activities with a wildlife theme.

CONTACTS

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

Deadline for contributions 1 December 2008



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The pulp used in the manufacture of this paper is from renewable timber produced on a fully sustainable basis.