Message from Deborah Cottam, Vice-Chair

As I write this, we are in cold and gloomy early January – I hope by the time it is read, Spring is visible on the horizon if not on well on the way! Despite our current lack of a Chair the Members Centre committee continues to keep MC business ticking over, and work on the reserves continues as always; thanks to all the committee members and volunteers for their tireless efforts.

We have also tried a new venture with our own Facebook page; search for SWT Fife and Kinross MC, with the fawn of our newsletter masthead (above) in colour as the profile picture. We’ll use this to post news, reminders and updates on events. Please feel free to contribute your comments and photos of wildlife.

It is always the case with organisations like ours that volunteers are continually sought. In these busy times many people are concerned about the level of commitment required; but we’ve always been a flexible and adaptable organisation and in times when members might not have time to organise a whole events programme, perhaps someone might like to organise just one event, an outing somewhere they know or a talk they’d like to hear; if they couldn’t take on a committee role alone, perhaps it could be shared between two or three friends working together. At the moment organisers are needed for our annual fund-raising coffee morning in St Andrews on 31st May. Please contact me as soon as possible if you can help, or would like to join a committee as an occasional helper. I am happy to liaise and co-ordinate.

Meanwhile, I hope as Spring arrives you are all getting out and about and enjoying our wonderful Scottish wildlife! All the best from Deborah.

In Memory of John

The Wild Things wildlife watch group in St Andrews have been given a generous donation by Louise Bell, in memory of John Munday.

A little over a year ago, SWT member John volunteered to help with the Wild Things, and was on track to become a group co-leader. John was very keen and the other leaders were very happy to have a new recruit! But sadly, shortly afterwards John fell ill and tragically he died.

In 2013 John’s friend Louise ran a sponsored half marathon and decided to donate the money to a cause close to John’s heart, and chose Wild Things. The Wild Things themselves and co-leaders Nikki Macdonald and myself are planning the best way to use this donation in John’s memory, to encourage children to enjoy wildlife. Louise says, “John would be delighted that you are consulting the children on how best to use the sponsor money. He always talked about the importance of the next generation in preserving our wonderful wildlife and outdoors. He was also a big kid at heart and liked nothing more than playing, walking and bird spotting with his grandchildren.”

Thank you, Louise.

Future Events—Your Committee Wants to Hear from YOU

Currently we provide a programme of indoor talks and outdoor events. There is a feeling that the lectures and outings are not well attended. The committee feels that this is a good moment to take stock of what we should be doing in future, and to stimulate a discussion amongst members as to what activities they would like to see and wish to support.

The Committee would welcome members’ opinions on:

1 What topics attract people to the talks and where would members like the talks located.

2 What type of outing attracts members and how far are members prepared to travel for these.

Let us know what you think about the above and even whether the events programme of talks and outings are considered to be a worthwhile activity of the MC. Any suggestions for subjects or speakers Feedback should be sent to the secretary or other MC members and we will consider the response at a future committee meeting.

Robertson is delighted to sponsor the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

As an infrastructure, support services and construction company we realise how important the protection of biodiversity sites is and continually monitor and update our Environmental Policy to reflect this. Our on-site monitoring ensures that we will never knowingly damage or disrupt areas of natural interest.
On the 27th November I was privileged to represent the Fife and Kinross SWT Member's Centre at the launch of the 2013-2018 Fife Local Biodiversity Action Plan (Fife LBAP). This details the actions to promote biodiversity in Fife over the next few years. Inspiring speeches set the LBAP in the national context and gave some examples of successful recent projects including the West Sands Dune restoration project at St Andrews, and the activities of Noble Foods at Thornton in developing habitat on their land, which has benefited their employees as well as the wildlife. Actions in the LBAP are split over 5 ecosystem types and Awareness Raising and education. One of the tasks allocated to the SWT is to hold an event on one of reserves to demonstrate good conservation practice for grazing lowland grassland.


Paul Blackburn Sec / MC rep on the Fife Biodiversity Partnership
Have you seen a Scottish polecat?

Lizzie Croose, The Vincent Wildlife Trust

Have you seen a polecat or feral ferret in Fife or elsewhere? The Vincent Wildlife Trust has just launched a national polecat survey and is keen to receive records of this elusive mustelid.

The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) is an independent charity engaged in mammal research and conservation, specialising in finding long-term solutions for the conservation of rare or ‘difficult to track’ mammals, including the polecat. The polecat is one of the least-known and least-studied members of the mustelid (weasel) family and is closely related to the pine marten, stoat, weasel and otter. The polecat is most easily recognised as the wild ancestor of the ferret; the ferret was domesticated from the polecat over 2,000 years ago. Polecats typically inhabit farmland where they den in burrows, log piles and haystacks and prey on rabbits and rats.

The polecat population in Britain declined during the 18th and 19th centuries due to persecution and became confined to central Wales. The population has been recovering since the mid-20th century and has re-colonised Wales and much of central and southern England, with an outlier population in north-west England which originated from a reintroduction. Polecats are believed to have become extinct across most of Scotland by the early 20th century, although subsequent reintroductions have been reported in Argyll, Loch Ness, Perthshire and Caithness, with varying levels of success and population establishment.

Polecats may breed with feral or escaped pet ferrets and produce hybrids, called polecat-ferrets. The proportion of polecat-ferrets is highest along the edge of the true polecat’s range and in reintroduced populations. Distinguishing between true polecats and polecat-ferrets can be problematic; polecat-ferrets tend to be paler in appearance and usually have more extensive pale facial markings than true polecats (the VWT has produced guidelines on this).

The VWT has undertaken two previous surveys in the 1990s and early 2000s to document the recovery of the polecat and has now launched a third survey to gather up-to-date information on the species distribution. During the last survey in 2004-2006, the Trust received one record of a polecat-ferret in Fife and nine records from Perthshire: six of these were classed as polecat-ferrets and three were classed as true polecats. Fife Nature Records Centre has received three reports of polecat-ferrets or feral ferrets during the last 10 years.

The VWT is keen to receive records of polecats, polecat-ferrets or feral ferrets, dead or alive, during 2014 and 2015 to contribute to their survey. The most common evidence of the presence of polecats is the body of animals killed on roads. For roadkill records, the Trust would like to receive photographs and/or the carcass to allow the animal to be classed as a polecat or a polecat-ferret. If you have collected a carcass, the Trust will send you a postage box in which the body can be returned free of charge. Some people are lucky enough to have a live sighting of a polecat or even have one in their garden; polecats sometimes den in or under sheds or garden decking. Please log your record(s) by emailing enquiries@vwt.org.uk, phoning 01531 636441 or visiting www.vwt.org.uk.

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Reserve Manager’s Update by Rory Sandison

Welcome to 2014! This year we celebrate 50 years of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Half a century of restoring Scotland’s habitats, protecting Scotland’s species and engaging people in the conservation of Scotland’s wildlife. We hope that you can be involved in helping celebrate this anniversary at some of our events being held throughout the year.

Activity on reserves has been steady over the winter with Duncan’s and Keith’s teams busy removing scrub from Fleecefaulds Meadow, helping volunteers reduce birch and pine growth on Bankhead Moss and repairing footpaths and boardwalks at a variety of sites. Laura and her volunteers have also been very busy with the livestock and repairing fences. Many thanks to everyone who has been volunteering with SWT this cold, wet and windy winter!

We will be selling lamb and beef from livestock reared on our reserves very soon - If you would like more information please contact Laura (sheepdogs@corriedhu.co.uk) or me (rsandison@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk).

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**EVENTS SPRING 2014**

**All welcome. We advise sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for outdoor events. There will be a £2 admission charge for indoor events unless stated otherwise.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thurs 20th March</strong></td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Illustrated Talk – The Nature of Scotland</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thurs 24th April</strong></td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Talk – Migration tales</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sun May 25th</strong></td>
<td>2pm</td>
<td><strong>Outing – Kilmninng Reserve</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sat May 31st</strong></td>
<td>10am – 12 noon</td>
<td><strong>Coffee Morning, St Andrews</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sat July 26th</strong></td>
<td>2pm</td>
<td><strong>Wader Watch, Tayport</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sat August 16th</strong></td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td><strong>National Moth Night at Loch Leven</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday 2nd September</strong></td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Cullaloe. Meet in car park at 9.00pm.</strong></td>
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**Calling All Photographers!**

SWT celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2014 and, as part of the celebratory activities, it is hoped to amass a collection of photographs of all our reserves, in different seasons, over the coming year. Please email any suitable images which you capture to Corrine Thompson (ctompson@swt.org.uk) who is the image database manager.

**CONTACTS**

Chair: Currently vacant: Enquiries to Vice-Chair or Secretary
Vice-Chair: Deborah Cottam, 01333 422116; deborahcottam@gmail.com
Secretary: Paul Blackburn, 01382 542826; pblackburn89@btinternet.com
Publicity: Jack Matthews, 01577 861066; matthews.ohan@tiscali.co.uk

FAWN Editor: Ian Hunter, Caiplie Farmhouse, Anstruther, KY10 3JR; 01333 312828; mish@st-and.ac.uk
Reserves Manager East Central Scotland: Rory Sandison, 0131 3127765; 07920 468562; rsandison@swt.org.uk
Members Centre Website: www.swt-fife.org.uk
SWT Headquarters (Leith): 0131 312 7765 Website: www.swt.org.uk

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