

DAWN - Newsletter of the North Angus and Angus & Dundee Members' Centres

Number 95 - August 2007

Introduction.....	1
Dawn Chorus.....	1
Annual General Meeting.....	2
Plants for Sale.....	2
Conservation Group at the Miley.....	2
Excursion to Carsegowniemuir	3
Outing to Fowlsheugh.....	3
Dates for your Diary.....	4

Introduction

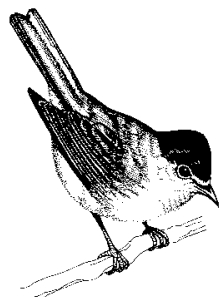
We've had an active spring, both in the Members' Groups and in the world around us. The mild winter and warm dry spring weather brought out many flowers, insects and breeding birds much earlier than usual and several of our excursions early in the season benefited from the unusual conditions. Since then the generally chilly days of rain and wind have held nature back but the activities have gone ahead as planned – more or less, anyway, as you will read in this newsletter.

Dawn Chorus

Sunday 29th April

"We've recorded 6 species already and we've been here only 5 minutes", said Bob McCurley, our leader, in the grey half-light just before five in the morning.

"We've seen or heard blackcap, chaffinch, blackbird, great tit and blue tit". A small group of keen local members, surprisingly bright eyed considering the time of the morning, gathered round. "Where's Bob Jaffray?" came from several quarters. "He's not feeling well and won't be able to make it." Unfortunately those stalwarts of the Balgavies dawn chorus mornings, Margaret Rogers and Dr Penny, also weren't well and wouldn't be able to come.



We didn't wait long, however, and Bob soon led us off down the track in the direction of the cottage. A few distant honking calls alerted the party to the presence of geese but there were plenty of other species close to the new path around the loch. Near the western end the harsh grating calls of a sedge warbler rasped out from the mass of dead reed stalks, but nobody could find the culprit. A little further on, though, several members were pleased to obtain good views of another calling male. Perhaps Tom and Mary were the first to pick out a calling chiff-chaff but soon everyone heard it. Willow warblers and wrens were also calling.

At the far end of the loch we were lucky to pick out the drumming of a distant great spotted woodpecker, while oystercatchers piped loudly overhead and coot and moorhen called from the water. All the while swallows and house martins skimmed enthusiastically low over the water.

One member called out that he was sure that there was a different duck, not a mallard, at the far end of the loch. Bob turned his binoculars on the bird and, after a short while, announced the verdict. He was right, the duck was a gadwall; a good find. There was an abundant crop of wood anemones on the slope below the lay-by as well other flowers and wildlife to see. Eduardo Gonzales found several interesting fungi, including St George's mushrooms. By the time we'd reached the hide – time for coffee and sustenance – there was a report of another duck, like a mallard but different enough to be noticeable from a distance. Dorothy and others directed their telescopes along the loch and were able to pick out a shoveller.

The total for the morning was 39 bird species recorded but, perhaps rather surprisingly, no starlings. Also, unfortunately, there was no croissant breakfast this year. Ah, well, we just had to head for home and a late breakfast or an early lunch.

Annual General Meeting

Angus and Dundee Member's Centre

Thurs 8th May

Our chairman, James Ivory, started by promising a swift and streamlined meeting – and so it proved. He began by thanking last year's chairman, Brian Ballinger, for the leadership and hard work he had put in over the six years of his chairmanship and went on to report on the state of the Dundee and Angus members' centre and the Scottish Wildlife Trust as a whole. The position was much more positive than it had been only a few years ago, with the financial situation being stabilised and the membership increasing steadily. Sales at our last two meetings were reported to be buoyant, totalling £242. He specifically thanked the Largs Trust, without whose support we would have much greater financial difficulties. The meeting was pleased to vote – unanimously – for Liz Houghton as the new Secretary, although she was unable to attend and notes were taken by Bob Jaffray. Lucy Ainsworth was also unopposed in joining the Committee. The chairman finished by thanking all members who'd put so much into fund raising and other activities this last year and hoped that the following season would be equally successful.

Following the close of business, Dr Hugh Ingram treated us to a visual tour of the new path around Balgavies Loch (just visited by the Dawn Chorus group) and then Jim Cook used slides to illustrate some of the interesting species of the Seaton Cliffs reserve. Next followed reports of the Miley and Lintrathen Loch, to finish on time – as promised.

Plants for Sale

Saturday 19th May

Members of the Dundee Support Group held a successful plant sale in the Demonstration Garden in Dawson Park, Dundee. The weather, unfortunately, didn't co-operate. It was a very windy morning but at least there was no rain.

The heart of the operation was a small but enthusiastic band of John Whyman, Daphne and Bill Macfarlane-Smith and, as usual, Tom and Mary Harwood. They priced and arranged the plants for the hoped-for hordes of eager customers, set up the tombola stall and readied the coffee and biscuits. In an effort to drum up local interest, Graham Cross and others continued the leaflet drop that had been going on all week.

Tom was a great salesman, ably assisted by Daphne, Bill and John with Margaret McLaren lend-

ing a hand. The best sellers, by far, were the bedding plants which, at £3 a tray, were a bargain and disappeared like the proverbial hot cakes, making a tidy sum as a good start to the day. Other popular sales were ground-cover plants and small perennials. The larger plants, the trees and large shrubs, didn't sell so well, although they were eventually bought for planting out in an area of rough ground. The total collected was a highly creditable £335.

The Dundee Group are very grateful to Dundee's Parks Department for their help and encouragement and co-operation in using the facilities of the Demonstration Garden. They hope to run a similar event next year. Would you like to take part or contribute plants? Please contact any member of the Dundee Group.

Conservation Group at the Miley

Saturday 27th May

How do we know that the environment of the Miley reserve, in Dundee, is gradually improving? During the visit of the Dundee Conservation Group in May, only two large trailer-loads of rubbish were collected and carried to the dump. This is still far too much but greatly reduced from previous years when literally skip-loads were cleared out. The hard work of earlier years seems to be gradually paying off.

We were pleased to welcome our chairman, James Ivory, but there were plenty of other hard-working hands as well, especially the seven from John Whyman's conservation volunteers, including Ian Hutchinson, Simon Morgan, Julie Sey, Nick Hopwood and Adam Cutler. They got stuck into removing the larger items of rubbish, old tyres, scrap metal, bits of old wood, bricks and similar items and then moved along to help clear out the trackside ditch again.

Members of the Dundee group, among them Margaret and Peter Bainbridge, Tom and Mary Harwood, Brian Ballinger and Graham Cross with interested volunteers Jacky Mackay and others, helped in the initial clear-out at the Loons Road end – they soon had a trailer load – and then began the usual litter-pick but this time away from the track, along the boundary fences.

Many of the group returned after a bite to eat to help control some of the invasive weeds, particularly the dreaded Japanese Knotweed, and to cut back overhanging vegetation and trim invading brambles.

They all did a marvellous job and left the reserve in a much better state.

Excursion to Carsegowniemuir

Tuesday 5th June

What's the best way to grow trees in rough ground in this area? How can you control rosebay willow-herb? What can be done about rabbit damage? These were questions that were answered during a visit to Carsegowniemuir Quarry, near Aberlemno. It formed an excellent introduction to Wildlife Week and the realities of practical conservation. A group of more than a dozen members, led by local group chairman James Ivory, were welcomed by owners Lorraine and Ronnie Young and their two enthusiastic lurchers. In fact, Milly and Purdey were only too willing to escort us around their quarry.

The site has been worked on for the last 20 years by members of Dundee Naturalists' Society – many of whom are also stalwarts of the Scottish Wildlife Trust! Margaret Duncan, whose vigorous promotion of the site and advocacy of the project did much to set it up, was also an SWT member, although she's back now in her native New Zealand.

Jim Cook, on behalf of the Naturalists, led the group around. They included local enthusiasts Alison Prain, Bob Jaffray, Trefor Woodford, Daphne Macfarlane-Smith and Margaret McLaren with Liz and Alban Houghton following on at the end of line.

Planting at Carsegowniemuir started in the autumn of 1986 and more than 20 native species, from ash and oak to rowans, Scot's pines and willows, have been introduced. Planting any trees at all is a problem as the site is an old quarry consisting mostly of heaps of shattered stone covered with a thin skin of soil. It is virtually impossible to use a shovel; holes must be dug with a pick. The best ways of dealing with willow-herb and fending off rabbits were also discussed and demonstrated. In fact most trees are growing well and the survival rate is around 84%.

Back at the cottage, we were royally welcomed to tea or coffee by the Youngs. Even more enticing was a deliciously warm Cherry and Almond cake, freshly baked by Lorraine. There were several requests for the recipe and not a crumb remained when we left. It had been a fascinating evening.

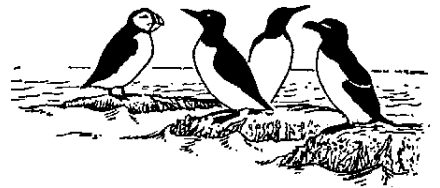
Outing to Fowlsheugh

Saturday 9th June

Long and thin and high – the RSPB's Aberdeenshire Reserve is poised on the edge of the North Sea. Little more than 2 metres wide at its narrowest point, it nonetheless is a captivating habitat between the productive farmland of the Mearns and the once fertile waters of the North Sea. Here we planned to explore the cliff top for all things wild.

Wildlife made itself felt immediately on arrival as skylarks serenaded from on high and a sedge warbler announced its territory from a garden tree. The sound of nearby kittiwakes tantalised with a preview of forthcoming delights, while the air was redolent of that necessary by-product of large sea-bird colonies.

The thousands of nesting gullmots, razorbills, fulmars and kittiwakes provide an awesome spectacle as the main nesting cliff came into view to amaze the eyes and assault the nostrils. They demonstrated death defying balancing acts on ledges at impossible angles that seem to be designed to tip the residents and their eggs into the crashing breakers below.



Poor breeding years due to lack of that vital ingredient – sand eels – has lessened the number of visiting breeders, but eggs had been laid in anticipation of adequate fruits from the sea. Attendant herring gulls were feeding their young chicks on sand eel, providing some measure of hope for the yet-to-be-hatched auks. Of course, a young guillemot chick is a tasty morsel for a passing gull and it remains to be seen whether such checks and balances are in favour of the predator or prey this year.

Surprise all round as painted lady butterflies sped around on the mild breeze – surely much earlier than they should be. More expected, bumblebees (including a dead *Bombus hortorum*) showed the presence of nectar and pollen a-plenty, while silver ground carpet moths fluttered out of our way as the path went through the deeper foliage.

Now there was entertainment provided by the sea parrot (or puffin for those with a more systematic mind). How many were hiding amongst the gullmots and razorbills? One, then two were spied before they flew off, doing wide circles before crashing back to earth. Two more appeared from a deep hole and another inside the cave going down a burrow. Was that five or did they just move about in front of us like a shell game in the hands of a streetwise hustler?

With the sun on the sparkling sea, there was many a swimming auk and gull and also a paddling bonxie. Some bottlenose dolphins cruised by, while, less energetically, grey seals sunned themselves on a rocky islet. The graceful, floating flight of gannets low over the water provided a silent elegance to complement the awe inspired in all the watchers.

The walk back to the car park provided time for reflection on the wonders of nature seen on this spectacular cliff reserve.

Dates for your Diary

Members' Centres Events

- Sun 12th August **Barry Buddon Outing** Led by Bob McCurley and Jim Cook. Meet 10 am at Car Park at Monifieth Playing Fields (NO 503 324). Bring lunch. Approx 5 to 6 hrs.
- Thurs 6th Sept **Beavers and Boars at Bamff** Near Alyth (NO 221 515) Led by Paul Ramsay and James Ivory. Interesting animals in near natural setting. Meet 6:30 pm. Approx 2½ hrs
- Weds 17th October **A Naturalist's Journey across Russia** by Dr Algirdas Knystautus - 7:30 pm in the D'Arcy Thomson Lecture Theatre (the main lecture hall in the Tower Block), University of Dundee
- Fri 19th October **Family Fun Quiz** To be led by Teacher Naturalists. 7:30 pm at Montrose Basin Visitor Centre. Come along and enjoy the fun; all teams welcome.
- Thurs 29th November **The Wildlife of Vane Farm and Loch Leven** by Uwe Stoneman RSPB 7:30 pm at Meffan Gallery, West High Street, Forfar. Admission £3.50.

Another note for your diary: The Dundee Support Group have organised a visit to Caird Park ponds, soon to be cleared of silt, at 7:00 pm on Tuesday 21st August; meet in the car park near Den o' Mains Castle. See you all there!

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre Events

- 1st-31st August **The Nature of Montrose Gardens** Photographic exhibition by Andy Wakelin 10:30am-5pm
- Weds 15th August **Baywatch 2** Guided nature walk along Montrose Beach to look at the birds and animals that use Montrose Bay. Montrose Beach Pavilion 10am-11:30am approx
- Sun 19th August **Family Fun Day** Activities for all the family including face painting, children's crafts, "Mud, Glorious Mud" and much, much more! £6.00 per family, £3.00 per single adult. 10:30-5pm
- Sun 26th August **Wildfowl ID** Guided walk to help identify some of the wildfowl community found on the Basin. (Wear wellies or boots and old clothes). Old Mill Car Park 2pm-4:30pm approx
- 1st-30th September **The Nature of Montrose Basin** Photographic exhibition by Andy Wakelin. 10:30am-5pm
- Sat/Sun 22nd/23rd September **Binocular Fair** Try them and buy them! 10:30am-5pm
- 1st – 31st October **SCAPE – Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion** Photographic Exhibition on coastal heritage and the threat of coastal erosion 10:30am – 5pm
- Sun 4th November **Goose Breakfast** Meet at the Visitor Centre then on to the reserve to watch the pink-footed geese fly out to feed. Back to the Centre for a light breakfast (for a small additional charge) Wear wellies or boots and old clothes. 6:30am-8:45am approx

The World "Wild" Web

The Angus and Dundee Members' Centre website is at

myweb.tiscali.co.uk/adbswt

and you can email on

adbswt@tiscali.co.uk

The SWT's home Web Pages are at

www.swt.org.uk

Dundee Conservation Volunteers

Contact John Whyman on (01382) 431848 (daytime), or 07940 165997 (mobile) for details of the current programme. A Sunday activity occurs once a month. The SWT minibus leaves Seagate Bus Station at 9:30am to the activity destination. Wear old clothes and stout boots. Bring waterproofs and lunch.

It's your chance to help conserve wildlife actively!



(SWT Family Membership includes children's WATCH membership)

Group	Leader	Meeting Place	Phone
Dundee	Ranger	Various Parks	01382 435911
Forfar	Craig Borland	Forfar Loch	01307 461118
Letham	<i>Group folded due to lack of interest.</i>		<i>01307 818438</i>
Montrose	Watch leader	Wildlife Centre	01674 676336

November 2007 - Newsletter Copy Deadline - 21st September 2007

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for November and December 2007, January, February and March 2008 that should be included in the next newsletter, please send it as soon as possible to the editor at the address below: Jim Cook, Science Section, Dundee College, Old Glamis Road, Dundee DD3 8LE. My email address is j.cook@dundeecoll.ac.uk

Nobody claimed to have spotted the deliberate mistake in the last edition which was a photo of red admiral instead of a peacock or small tortoiseshell butterfly.