



Wildlife News



Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future

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

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Introduction

Despite the wet miserable weather that seemed to dominate so much of this last summer, our outings were very fortunate and provided excellent opportunities for seeing a wide variety of local wildlife. The notes in this newsletter report on the success of these excursions. Perhaps they will interest you and encourage more members to come out with us on our visits to local wildlife sites. We all hope that the programme for next year, enclosed with this newsletter and magazine, will be as successful and attract even more members.

Keltneyburn

Sunday 8th July

One of the best sites for orchids in eastern Scotland must be Keltneyburn, near Aberfeldy. It is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) for its habitat of base-rich grassland, on glacial drift deposits, and associated plant species. A group of almost 20 members and friends met up on site and were treated to a master class of orchid biology and identification by Brain Allan, author of 'The Orchids of Scotland', ably backed up by Brian Ballinger, former chairman of Dundee Members' Centre. James Ivory, current chairman, arrived to show his support. The two local leaders were Kirsty Dickens, former warden of the reserve, and David Darling, the current warden. Brain Allen showed the party several Common Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and a number of interesting hybrids in the trampled long grass near the track. Then Liz and Alban Houghton found a couple of greater butterfly orchids in the same area. Kirsty and David explained the results of the experi-

ment in progress, using cattle grazing and trampling in an effort to control encroaching grasses.

On the hillocks above the track a number of clumps of that handsome aromatic herb, spignel meu, were dotted over the slopes. Unfortunately, one of the specialities of the site, small white orchid, had already finished flowering. Margaret McLaren, in the lead at that point, found a few dried flower spikes.

The higher ground provided a view over the site of the SSSI and also of a major problem. Bracken is choking out much of the interesting vegetation. Kirsty told us that it had been sprayed with azulox, a special herbicide, which had reduced the infestation but also eliminated the interesting little fern, moonwort .

Further down the slope, among the birch trees, Jane Stewart and Dorothy Fyffe found several spikes of the greenish orchid, greater twayblade, and one or two bird's-nest orchids. On wet ground nearby were a few heath spotted orchids (*Dactylorhiza ericetorum*). In the same area Bruce McClymont and June Dolan identified and counted over twenty plants of globeflower. The party finished its visit by being led by Brian Allan to see a single northern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*), the only species typical of the site that we had not seen. It had been a most successful excursion.

Barry - Buddon

Sunday 12th August

The heavy rain of early morning had a considerable effect on the numbers of birders and botanists who came along this year. Only 27 members and friends appeared, less than half the total of the last few years. However, the rain eased off and there were hopes of improvement. We began, as in the previous year, by Graham Cross organising us to take a group photograph. (Although no copy of this photo appeared in the Courier, at least Bob McCurley was able to arrange for an article to be printed.)

Bob led the bird group off along the coast while Jim took a small group of botanists down to the

marsh at the mouth of the Buddon burn. Barbara Hogarth, the county botanical recorder, and Pat Gaff moved off to look for interesting species while a few other independents spread out over the reserve. The bird group soon saw a good range of small birds, as might be expected among the bushes and grasses, a kestrel flew over and then a buzzard appeared. They were starting to develop a formidable list. The plant group also did well. Among the reeds were a few stalks of gypsywort and, a little further over, the leaves of giant water-dock. In the damp areas of shorter plants the party found numbers of that iconic species, the wonderfully white flowers of Grass of Parnassus. These grew among a variety of rushes and sedges. A few brown stalks of northern marsh orchids, well past flowering, could be seen scattered through the grass.

By this time the clouds thinned as blinks of sunshine began to warm the ground, and a few specimens of dark green fritillary butterflies appeared. Further over, among the dunes were well-developed clumps of wild basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*) and marsh cinquefoil abounded in an overgrown pond.

Later in the morning both groups made for the ponds and scrapes on the way to the lighthouse. At the ponds Mary Reid quickly spotted specimens of emerald damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*) and both the common blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) and blue-tailed (*Ishneura elegans*) damselflies appeared soon after. Large numbers of tadpoles, perhaps from toads, clustered at the water's edge while numbers of small frogs were already hopping through the grass. The distinctive call of a little grebe drew our eyes to the water but the bird dived almost immediately. Shortly after, Anne Reid picked out several large dragonflies flitting among the spike rushes. Probably they were common darters (*Sympetrum striolatum*).

At about one o'clock, the various parties gathered again for a bite to eat and to enjoy the sun. Hugh Bell had spent the night before running a moth trap at the lighthouse and turned up several species, in particular a shore wainscot moth which seems to be a new record for Angus. Well done, Hugh! Most people inspected the catch before they were released.

Afterwards, most members crossed over to the high dunes overlooking the estuary. Apart from a few terns and ducks and the inevitable oystercatchers, there was little of interest, just a scattering of waders.

On the way back through the dunes, a few peacocks and grayling butterflies appeared, and both were added to the growing lists. To improve our insect records even more, the sun came out and the air turned distinctly warm. We soon found the striking orange and black cinnabar moth caterpillars on ragwort plants and several notable adults butterflies –

small coppers, small heath, green-veined white, large white, meadow brown and more peacocks and dark green fritillaries.

The botany group added to their records as well, with adder's-tongue ferns and greater twayblades, as expected, but the bird group did the best. Their list totalled 77 species, a record, the most notable being kingfisher and peregrine falcon. A day well spent!

Beavers and Boars

Thursday 6th September

It was a wonderful wildlife evening. Two dozen members and friends met at Bamff (no, not *that* Banff!) near Alyth on a rather cloudy but still evening and were introduced by James Ivory, our members' centre chairman, to owner and beaver enthusiast Paul Ramsay. He explained that a small number of European beaver had been imported under licence from Bavaria, where the animals were thriving, and introduced into a fenced nearly-wild area on the estate. We were asked to remain very quiet and then escorted across to the beaver enclosure. It proved to be a network of ponds and small streams interspersed with patches of trees – and rather difficult to cross quietly, although we all tried to make as little noise as possible. Although Peter Bainbridge, Bruce McClymont and others helped some of the party to cross the streams, a few members made rather louder squelches than intended and found that they had wet feet early on. Those fitter members with longer legs, Joy and Vic Cammack, Liz Houghton, Lucy Ainsworth and others were able to remain dry-shod.

European beavers do not normally build such large dams as the North American species and the party were led to a low dam surrounded by numbers of felled trees. We were impressed by the sizes of some of the trees brought down, some being at least 20 – 30 cms across. We were informed that most had been felled last winter. One, though, was still standing and had been worked on recently. The beavers had moved evenly round the trunk of a sizeable grey alder tree, scattering piles of fresh woodchips around the base. The sizes of some of these chips were pretty impressive. Also impressive were the sizes of some of the canals dug by the beavers to allow them to reach the trees while remaining close to the safety of water. Obviously, 'beavering away' is not just an empty expression! Colin McLeod, Ian Baird and others spent a few minutes trying to find clear specimens of beaver prints on the exposed mud but without much success.

Paul led the party over to a small pond and pointed out a large pile of branches and other debris on the far bank. That, we were informed, was one of their lodges or beaver homes. However, there were

Flag Day Collections

The last two collection days were highly successful. The street collection, otherwise known as a 'flag day' in Monifieth High Street on 4th August and at the Carnoustie Co-op store on 8th September were both well supported and raised totals of £197.72 and £240.09 respectively.

There are still a few more events to come but we'll let you know what the grand total has been for this year in the next newsletter.



in near darkness, Liz Houghton was able to use her bat detector to pick up and identify the distinctive calls of long-eared bats, a most interesting record.

The other party had a more exciting time, although were not able to catch a glimpse of any beavers. They did, however, hear a tail-slap, a beaver warning sound, from a patch of dense water plants. At first the concern was that the large numbers of pheasants flapping around and calling noisily would frighten off any other wildlife. Then, quite suddenly, there was a splash and Colin Ainsworth breathed "I can see something heading our way", and a large creature emerged from the water onto the bank directly in front of the party, less than 20 metres away. Despite the heavy shade under the trees, Colin, Eduardo Gonzales and others were able to identify it as a large otter. The animal totally ignored our human presence and sniffed around on the bank for a full five minutes, giving us all excellent views.

It certainly made the evening, but the 'interesting wildlife' wasn't finished with the party yet. A few minutes later Brian Ballinger pointed out a moving dark shadow under the trees on the other side of a small inlet. It proved to be large wild boar. Shortly after, Margaret Bainbridge spotted three of the animals quietly making up behind us. At first they seemed nervous, snorting gruffly and loudly and diving back into cover, but quickly gained in confidence. Soon there were eight of them and most seemed large, very large. By this time it was nearly dark and we decided that discretion was definitely the better part of valour and made tracks back to the electrified fence. We were followed all the way, at only a few metres range, by an escort very interested to find if we had left anything edible behind.

The programme had advertised plenty of 'interesting animals in a near natural setting' and we certainly had a series of excellent sightings. As Shona Baird said "It was well worth it, despite the wet feet".

Dundee Group Caird Park

Thursday 21st August

John Whyman brought his van right to the edge of the upper pond in Caird Park and offloaded a table, a number of collecting nets, specimen trays, record sheets and identification leaflets. The reason why John was so keen to record the wildlife of the ponds was that they are all due to be cleared out in the near future (and will have had much of the mud removed by the time you read this).

The members soon got to work and within minutes had a good selection of the common specimens in the trays. Mary and Tom Harwood both proved dab hands with the collecting nets and Margaret McLaren caught a tiny fish. John and Jim were kept busy identifying and recording the 'wee beasties' found. Soon we were joined by several young lads who were very interested to see what we were catching and asked if they could join in. It was good to find a few more volunteers. There was an excellent group of flatworms, small leeches, water mites, freshwater shrimps (*Gammarus sp.*), water hog-lice, mayfly nymphs, midge larvae, pea mussels, snails and sticklebacks. However, some larger boys came along and they began to throw stones and soon became a nuisance. We packed up and left.

Our next stop was Trottick Ponds. Again, we had great fun and were highly successful. The best 'catch' of the evening was almost the last an 'eft'. What is an eft, you might ask? Well, most of the members present didn't know either, but it's a larval newt, like a small adult, perfect in every respect but still carrying external gills. In fact, we found several, the larvae of common newts (*Triturus vulgaris*). We also found an interesting range of plants, a few birds and mammals and, on the way back in the gathering dusk, a few pipestrelles and perhaps a long-eared bat. It had been a fascinating evening.

(If anyone would like a copy of the list, then please contact John Whyman.)

Dates for your Diary

Members' Centres Events

- 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.
- 2008**
- Sat 26th January **Dundee Botanic Garden** Led by Curator Alistair Hood & Hugh Ingram
Meet 10.30 am at Car Park, Botanic Gdns, Riverside Drive (NO 369 297)
Refreshments afterwards in Botanic Gdns. Cafe. Admission Charge, non-members £3, concession £2
- Thurs 20th March **Bats — Myth & Reality** Presentation by Keith Cohen 7:30 pm at Meffan Gallery, Forfar.
Admission £3.50.
- Sun 27th April **Dawn Chorus: Trottick Ponds, Dundee** Led by Bob McCurley & Jim Cook
Meet 5 am at Hide Car Park (NO 407 337) Approx 2 hrs
- Thur 24th April **Lintrathen Loch**, Talk on New Development plans by Rab Potter, following Annual General Meeting. 7:30 pm at Meffan Gallery, Forfar.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre Events

- 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
- Weds 7th November **Iceland** Illustrated talk by Russell Nisbet MBVC 7:30pm
- 1st Dec - 31st March **Exhibition** on feeding wild birds. Friday - Sun 10:30am - 4pm

Email addresses?

Your Members' Centre is trying to improve the method and speed of communication between members. One way, if your "on the web", is to use email. If you would like to join in, would you let us know your email address and then we can email everyone with the latest news about events, excursions and other activities.

Please send it to Margaret Bainbridge, Membership Secretary at plbdundee@btinternet.com

Of course, we need your permission to hold any information about you. If you send your email address in, we assume that you are giving permission for us to hold it electronically.

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
Montrose	Watch leader	Wildlife Centre	01674 676336

March 2008 - Newsletter Copy Deadline - 31st January 2008

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for March to August 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@dundeeoll.ac.uk