



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

The variable weather at the start of the year may be sign of global warming but it is highly confusing to plants, birds and insects. The visit to Dundee Botanic Garden in January was blessed by a spell of mild winter weather and members heard snatches of early bird song. Unfortunately an unseasonably long and cold spell delayed the best display of flowers for the excursion to visit the bluebell wood.

The number of items packed into this newsletter shows how busy our members have been. We hope the improving weather will bring them and you out for at least some of the events in our programme.

Alison Prain – an appreciation

Alison Prain had been a member of the Trust since 1973, and acquired a deep and wide understanding of the its work and philosophy. When she later assumed the role of Secretary of the Branch she brought her knowledge, coupled with her fine sense of duty, to the post which she held for over ten years.

She was widely admired and respected throughout the community and the extent to which her loss was felt was indicated by the packed church of St Mary's at Kirriemuir on 8th February.

That Alison had a well developed sense of duty and service, and an ability to impart knowledge, must have been apparent from an early age and, coupled with the emerging gift of being able to inspire enthusiasm about her subject, led inevitably toward a career in teaching.

This was progressively to lead to the exacting role of HMI Schools with an area of responsibility which included much of the Western Isles. In those days the mode of transport was by stately de Havilland Dragon Rapide biplane with landings on sandy beaches, and Alison would recount with some glee how, if something of interest was spotted on the sea, the pilot would simply drop down and circle around to allow them a better view!

I remember her telling of her experiences in taking groups of young people on courses at an earlier Glenmore Lodge in the heart of the Cairngorms, introducing them to the joys and wonderment at being part of the wilderness. She would recount how some of her charges, who had hardly ever before experienced life anything greater than a hundred yards from the tarmac, were so enthralled by the fact that they, with sleeping bags and food on their backs, were able to spend not one but two full days and nights in the remote mountain fastness learning, not only about the wilderness, but about their own capabilities at the same time. How fortunate these young people were to have such a sensitive and inspirational mentor.

Alison was known and respected for her lively interest in botany and on her annual visits to the Island of Iona, she always made a point of checking on the condition of the Sea Holly which grew amongst the sand just above high water mark on the island's north west shore. This writer was always charged, when visiting, to report back on the general condition of the plant, latterly by mobile phone.

An example of Alison's ever ready willingness to plunge deeply into the concerns that she shared was when the Management Committee for the Balgavies Reserve was revived and was in desperate need of a secretary. She was asked if she would help out on a strictly temporary basis and she agreed without hesitation. This did much to get the new committee off to a good start thus a debt is owed to Alison for all that has been achieved since. We also remain in her debt for her biscuits at the Meffan Gallery meetings!

As we remember a fine colleague and warm and loyal friend, the best memorial we can have to Alison will be to carry on the good work in the manner she would have wished.
Bob Jaffray

Dundee Botanic Garden

Saturday 26th January

A group of a dozen local SWT members and friends were welcomed by Dr Neil Paterson, the Botanic Garden's Education Officer, who took us straight in to see the mural of 1.2 billion years of plant evolution. We then heard from Meg and Jim Shearer, SWT members and Friends of Dundee Botanic Garden, about the lack of finance for the garden and its threatened closure.

The garden tour began in the greenhouses. We were shown the plants around and on the tropical pool, particularly the water lettuce and the notorious water hyacinth – the species that is one of the world's top ten plant pests.

Outside in the gardens, the party basked in the relatively mild conditions while Neil described the history of the garden and its tree plantings. The party moved on to the 'evolution garden' that was being created. It should be ready for next year's anniversary of Darwin's book and boasts an intriguing design that will highlight a number of interesting species and aspects of the process.

Dr Paterson led the group over the 'mountain' known as Ben Lawers, pointing out a variety of species of such native Scottish alpine plants as lady's-mantles and mountain willows, and then down past a variety of native habitats to see the newly-created area of sand and seashore plants. We continued on through the garden and eventually reached the Australasia garden where Dr Paterson took his leave.

Brian Ballinger thanked him warmly on our behalf.

Dundee Group - Miley Walk

Sunday 10th February

It was clear mild morning and a small party of Dundee Group members met for a walk along the Miley. Mary Harwood, Dundee organiser welcomed the group.

A few green shoots were visible along the side of the path along with the occasional early flowers – a winter aconite or two just starting to show and some clumps of snowdrops. The leaves of bluebells, early buttercups and archangel were seen as well but there were no signs of flowers.

Along the path we could hear the urgent territorial calls of great tits and blue tits, the sharp trills of robins, a wren, blackbirds in full song in the trees

overhead and one or two thrushes around about, even a single pheasant call in the distance.

We also picked up the worst examples of litter along the path. As always, the quantity amassed was amazing. It took most of the party to carry the bulging collecting bags over the Harestane Road to the Council waste site.

Bats – Myths and Mystery

Thursday 20th March

A group of 35 members and friends were in turn entertained, amused and informed at the fascinating lecture on bat biology by Keith Cohen.

Keith began by debunking a number of the myths associated with bats. They aren't blind at all. Tropical fruit bats, otherwise known as 'flying foxes', one of the two great groups of bats, have the large sensitive eyes typical of many nocturnal animals and can see well at night. Even the 'micro' bats, familiar to us, have bright little eyes and can see perfectly well – although they do use pulses and squeaks of very high frequency sound to hunt for insects in pitch darkness.

Although it is difficult to refute the old wives' tale that bats get caught in the hair, there is no direct evidence that they do. If a bat flies close to your head at night, it is much more likely to be homing in on the cloud of (non-biting) midgies clustered around above you, attracted by the carbon dioxide in your breath or by light-coloured clothing.

Although 3 species of bats do drink blood, they all are confined in South America, tend to prey on the same cow or horse if they can and anyway don't suck blood but lap it up from a re-opened wound.

There are five species of bats in most of Scotland, up to the Great Glen, but only the smallest one, the pipistrelle, reaches Orkney and the Western Isles. The common and soprano pipistrelle bats, Daubentons and brown long-eared bats are relatively common in the central belt and a little further north but Natterer's bats are more confined to central and southern Scotland. Keith went on to discuss some of the more recent findings about how far they may roam in search of insects and the implications for such facilities as wind turbines and farms. He illustrated his points with a short video showing a bat meeting and being hit by a spinning blade.

After an informative discussion on a wide variety of points, the audience awarded the evening's lecturer a hearty vote of thanks.

AGM Thursday 24th April

James Ivory, our chairman, led the meeting through the required business. He paid a most generous tribute to the memory of Alison Prain (see the obituary by Bob Jaffray on p1.) and then led the discussion of the accounts. They are very satisfactory, up £1,000 on last year, but largely due to the lack of spending this past year on the reserves. This, however, will be rectified this coming year, with sums earmarked for surveys and similar work.

The chairs of the sub-committees were re-elected and the committee members were confirmed. There is, however, one vacancy for a member from the Arbroath area. Applications are still invited.

The meeting ended with a presentation by Liz Houghton to former secretary, Bob Jaffray, of a glass jug that was beautifully engraved with his favourite wildlife, a great crested grebe, in thanks for his work for the local group of the Trust.

Afterwards, Rab Potter, East Coast reserves manager, gave a most interesting and informative talk on Lintrathen Loch and its management policies.

Dawn Chorus Sunday 27th April

A total of 17 members and friends dragged themselves out of bed to arrive at Trottick Ponds at 5 am. Bob McCurley, the morning's leader, greeted the arrivals in the semi-darkness. The weather for bird watching and listening were excellent, clear with only a light breeze although a little chilly.

A number of species were singing lustily as the group gathered. The closest to us were several robins, but we could also hear the melodious fluting of blackbirds, the rather harsh song of a wren beside the Dighty, the repetitive calls of great tits, the tumbling call of blackcap and many others.

Within half an hour, though, as the light strengthened the frenzy of the early morning song slackened noticeably but there were still a number of birds to hold our interest. Bob, along with ranger John Whyman, led us along between Trottick ponds and the Dighty, ably assisted in the identifications of calls by Neil Mitchell, who'd come down from Montrose Basin. Marjory Gillan, a relative newcomer to 'bird-hearing', was able to gain plenty of practice in distinguishing the various calls as the party made its way about half a mile upstream. As the sun came up Stewart Dodd, carrying a camera with a long lens on a monopod, was able to capture a number of clear photographs.

Back beside the larger of the Trottick ponds, most were fortunate to have excellent views of a hand-

some goldfinch that almost seemed to be posing on a pine branch. We were well pleased by our efforts. By the time we'd finished our walk, at about 8 o'clock, the party had recorded a total of 31 bird species.

Bluebell Wood Sunday 11th May

It's always very difficult to choose the best date, a year in advance, to view a bluebell wood in its prime, but all the party of 15 members and friends were impressed by the spectacle. In the early afternoon James Ivory welcomed the group into his bluebell wood, the only reasonably large example in Angus, an excellent one as it turned out.

It wasn't long before the first bluebells came into sight. At first just a scattering of deep blue heads could be seen but then we were able to marvel at the sight of sheets of deep, almost luminous blue. However, although the timing had been planned very carefully the previous year, this season had been extremely late and the full show was not yet on display.

The site clothes a steep slope down to the river Isla and relatively high in the north-west of Angus. Even here there were signs of possible hybridisation with the dreaded Spanish bluebells. Pat Gaff reported seeing some rather more open bells than normal, showing the effects of pollen carried in from the Spanish interlopers. Richard Brinklow spent much of his time with an insect net catching a variety of species including one new beetle.

Dorothy Fyffe and Doris Malcolm kept watchful eyes open for birdlife and saw or heard a good range, ranging from buzzards to dippers and numbers of typical woodland species. Bruce McClymont and June Dolan had joined us to explore a part of Angus that was new to them and were very impressed. Liz Houghton was there accompanied by a daughter and new grandchild. There's nothing like introducing potential members to local wildlife as early as possible!

Several of the members of the group remained on the track but a number of others, including Alison Cameron and Ian and Shiona Baird made it down to the river's edge. Several fresh water nets were used to sample the wildlife below and among the stones at the river's edge. The large numbers of mayfly larvae, caddis-fly larvae, freshwater limpets and, especially, the large stone-fly larvae, showed the quality and purity of the river.

The party continued on through the wood, being impressed by further vistas of vibrant blue. Another few days of warm weather would mean that the spectacle was even better but it was impressive nevertheless. The meeting ended at about 5 pm, with a hearty vote of thanks to James and his wife.

Plant Sale Saturday 17th May

The Dundee group held a plant sale at Dawson Park Demonstration Garden. The day started cloudy and dull but the helpers had the sale up and running with a good selection of excellent plants, in time for the early enthusiasts. As the day wore on, the weather got better and brought out more customers and soon, the tables were looking bare.

The helpers, Daphne and Bill McFarlane-Smith, and Kate Treharne were there all day with Tom and Mary Harwood. John Whyman and Joy Cammack could only assist in the morning.

Although there were fewer plants and helpers than last year, the magnificent sum of £431.30 was raised, £100 more than 2007.



Dates for your Diary

Members' Centres Events

- Sun 10th August **Barry Buddon Joint 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
- Sun 5th October **Fungi at Reswallie.** Led by Gordon Maxwell & Liz Houghton. Meet at 2pm at Murton Car Park (NO 491 511) Approx 2 hrs
- Thurs 27th Nov **Beautiful Butterflies & Marvellous Moths.** Presentation by Paul Kirkland. 7:30 pm at Meffan Gallery, West High Street, Forfar. Admission £3.50.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre Events

- Wed 6th August **Children's Activities** – "Pondamonium". 10:30am – 12:30pm
- Wed 13th August **"Baywatch"** – Guided nature walk from Ferryden to Scurdieness. Free. 10am – 11:30am
- Sun 24th August **"Family Fun Day"** - Activities for all the family. 10:30am – 5pm
- Sun 24th August **"Wildfowl ID"** – Guided walk to help identify some of the wildfowl and waders found on the Montrose Basin LNR. Free. 10am – 1:30pm approx. Old Mill Car Park
- Sat 20th & Sun 21st Sept **Binocular Fair** – A chance to test out a large selection of optical equipment with expert advice from the Charles Frank representative. 10:30am – 5pm
- Sun 5th October **"Goose Breakfast"** – Meet at the Montrose Basin Visitor Centre then on to the reserve to watch the pink-footed geese fly out to feed, then back to the Centre for a light breakfast" (This event has a small charge of £3.00) 6:30am – 8:45am approx
- Sun 26th October **"Feed our feathered friends"** – Children's Autumn fun day – Enjoy a day with the staff and volunteers helping the kids to make their own bird feeders. 10:30am – 5pm

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

November 2008 - Newsletter Copy Deadline - 5th September 2008

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for December 2008 to March 2009 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