

Spring 2010 NEWSLETTER



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SWT
ABERDEEN

www.swtaberdeen.org.uk



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Chairman's News

First, I want to give you some excellent news. We have been really lucky to find a new, experienced newsletter editor in Lynn Wood just as our previous editor, Simon Barrett has stepped down due to work and world travel commitments. We are sorry to lose Simon especially because he managed to bring new life to the newsletter and many members commented positively on that. But I know that Lynn comes with plenty of ideas and an existing track record that will be invaluable to us. She also has good web editing skills, much to the relief of the Committee which definitely does not, and our Member Centre website is already seeing the benefit. You can see the website at: www.swtaberdeen.org.uk The newsletter is one of our main membership communication methods but you should use it to let everyone know about your great wildlife experiences. We would love to hear your stories or whatever is on your mind about the natural world in the North East of Scotland. Please send anything for publishing to Lynn swtnewsletter@yahoo.co.uk or contact any committee member. We would also like captioned wildlife photographs and brief stories for the website so please submit these too.

Some of you may already know that this year is the UN declared International Year of Biodiversity (IYB2010). The Scottish Government has fully signed up to celebrating this and also drawing attention to what's good and not so good about the state of wildlife and nature in Scotland. Many events are planned throughout the year by government agencies and voluntary groups and your local SWT Member Centre intends to do its bit too. You will see some of our activities sporting the IYB2010 logo throughout the year. If you have good ideas for events please let us know.

In a recession, it is often the easiest course for Government and Local Authorities to cut spending on environment and conservation and then wildlife and biodiversity suffer. I have to say though that in the North East we are lucky that our councils continue to contribute funding to a highly successful biological recording centre and an active biodiversity action plan. Together these have been acknowledged as some of the most effective in Scotland. The North East Biodiversity Partnership is something we should all get to know more about. It has a group of enthusiastic participants from agencies, councils and voluntary groups and many ideas for improving opportunities for wildlife in our part of the world. Recently, for example, I was at a workshop hosted by the Partnership where we discussed some great ideas for where we could improve or expand wetlands and we learned how this had been done in other parts of Scotland. In this newsletter you will also see how the Local Authorities are pressing ahead with identifying new Local Nature Conservation Sites. This network might well become very important for ensuring that plans for further urbanisation take into account our best wildlife sites. We can all help with that too: ideas for where LNCS designations should apply would be welcome.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of our newsletter; please let us know if you do or if you have ideas for what else we should be telling you.

Roger Owen

Update from the Reserves Manager

Red Moss of Netherley

Our Convenor for this site – Mr Gordon Morris resigned in late 2009 for personal reasons. I would like to thank Gordon for all the work he has put into the reserve in the past. So.... we now have a vacancy for a convenor at this site – anyone interested please contact me.

We have completed work on digging out the ditch alongside our access track onto the moss. We have also erected a new fence to stop the cows from our neighbours land walking onto the access track and “puddling” it.

As you are probably aware, the Aberdeen bypass has been given the go ahead by the Scottish Government. This does however mean that SWT are very likely to receive around £16,000 from the Mitigation Fund to carry out more work on this reserve over the next three years. Mike Stevens has completed all the damming work and SNH seem pleased with this work

Longhaven Cliffs

Initial figures would suggest the seabird colonies on the reserve have had a reasonable season at Longhaven – certainly better than some other sites particularly on the west coast. I am regularly getting unconfirmed sightings of sea eagles from the reserve. There is certainly one of the recently released birds in the general area.

We have received funding to allow us to improve the footpath on the reserve. After much discussion, we have decided to construct a level walking surface along the length of the reserve. This will be carried out by a combination of contractors and Mike and his volunteers. This level surface will be much easier for Mike to mow/strim on a regular basis and keep clear. We intend to start this work in April 2010.

We still occasionally have a problem with motorised vehicles (trail bikes) using the southern part of the reserve. I have spoken to SNH and the local Wildlife Crime Officer about this matter.

We are also in the final stages of completing a funding application to allow us to revise completely the interpretation on the site. This is to complement the upgraded footpath.

Coulnacraig Meadow

Mike Stevens continues to carry out annual cutting of the meadow. A new Management Plan was completed in November. During the writing of this plan I spent a very interesting (albeit wet) morning on the reserve with our Convenor, Morag Wilson. There is little change in the actual management tasks within this plan; however, we agreed that monitoring, which Morag had been carrying out for many years, should be revised. Anyone within the Members Centre who would like to input their ideas to this revised monitoring is very welcome to contact me

Gight Woods

Mike is once again carrying out his annual tasks of keeping the footpath clear and reducing the amount of non native trees within the reserve. We have had to fell a few large trees near the footpath for safety reasons, and the recent snow decimated the blackthorn thicket near the entrance to the reserve.

Our Convenor, Dr Mark Young, and I met with the Ythan Angling Association and the Forestry Commission (FC) recently regarding a bridge the Angling Association had constructed over the river, without any consultation with us or FC who own

the land on the other bank. It was felt this bridge was not safe and we requested it be closed. We are willing to discuss plans for any future proposed bridge with the Angling Association however, we would need to carefully consider the implications for the reserve before supporting any proposal.

We are still in the process of applying for funding to carry out woodland management and access work within the reserve.

If anyone has any question about the above report or any matter relating to Aberdeenshire reserves please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Rab Potter

Volunteering Opportunities

Members are welcome to attend volunteer days held on the first Saturday of each month. Please contact Mike Stevens before the Thursday of the preceding week. Limited places are available for pick up from the Aberdeen area. Actual tasks to be carried out will be dependent on priorities at the time.

Tel 01466 780164

Rab Potter is also keen to hear from members who can help by undertaking surveys on a regular basis during the summer months. This could be butterfly transects; bird; fauna; and flora surveys. You can help us whilst pursuing your own particular interests.

Tel 01828 634205

Planning and Forestry News

Over the last six months, we have responded to a number of consultations and planning proposals. The first of these was the Main Issues Report concerning future development land in Aberdeenshire; we responded by stressing the need for biodiversity and habitat networks to be given much greater consideration during planning decision making.

We were also invited to contribute to the Aberdeenshire Open Spaces Strategy. Aberdeenshire Council would like to see future developments include a higher proportion of open green space, some of which would be managed for amenity and recreation and some for wildlife. SWT support this aspirational idea, but of course, there are costs involved, which would be borne by developers, and in these harsh economic times, the building industry is reluctant to bear the extra costs.

As to planning proposals, we lodged an objection for a proposed development of several hundred houses in the Castle grounds in Ellon, on the basis of loss of Spring 2010

habitat for red squirrels, badgers and bats. There have been several applications for small groups of wind turbines across many parts of the shire, we have not objected to these, as SWT policy is to support the development of renewable energy as a means of combating rising CO₂ emissions. The developments were all small-scale and did not pose a significant risk to any valuable habitat.

Forestry activity has been very quiet, but we have just received an invitation to review the forest design plans around our Gight Reserve near Methlick. We hope to have a site visit along with Forestry Commission staff to look into how the commercial plantations can be managed with as little disruption to the habitats and species on the reserve as possible.

Douglas Gooday



SAVING SCOTLAND'S RED SQUIRRELS

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels aims to stop the decline of red squirrel populations in key areas of Scotland north of the Central Belt and to improve conditions for viable red squirrel

populations across Scotland. It is a partnership project between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association. It is part of Scotland's Species Action Framework, which sets out a strategic approach to species management in Scotland.

As part of Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS), the first nationally co-ordinated project in Scotland for red squirrel conservation led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), action is now underway to save red squirrels in North East Scotland – and it looks like this action could already be showing signs of success. North East action to save red squirrels could already be making a difference.

Grampian is home to a very large and nationally important red squirrel population but these populations are under threat. The grey squirrel, a non-native species from North America, has an established territory in Aberdeen and is now spreading across Aberdeenshire, particularly up the river corridors of the Dee and Don. The red squirrel has already disappeared from many areas due to grey squirrel spread.

However, thanks to SSRS work to protect reds with co-ordinated grey squirrel control and advising landowners in key areas about woodland management

techniques to help red squirrels thrive, the project reports that red squirrels are beginning to return to some areas.

Hollie Walker, the SSRS North East Project Officer employed by SWT, explained: “We are now receiving reports of red squirrel sightings in areas where they haven’t been seen for many years. This includes areas such as Cults and Countesswells, as well as Bieldside in Aberdeen City. These signs are encouraging as it could indicate that our efforts are already reaping benefits.

“The North East is lucky to still have huge areas of good quality red squirrel habitat, and many of these areas still remain free from grey squirrels. However, we must act now to halt grey squirrel spread to these areas and protect our red squirrels.

“Grey and red squirrels cannot co-exist together. Once grey squirrels move into an area habituated by red squirrels trends show that red squirrel numbers will decline over time. This can be seen in the Central Belt, where red squirrels have almost completely disappeared. We are working to ensure this doesn’t happen in the North East.”

The work of SSRS depends on the involvement of land managers and gamekeepers in the project’s key areas as well as support from the public. To find out more or get involved visit www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk or contact Hollie Walker at redsquirrelgrampian@swt.org.uk.

If you spot a grey or a red squirrel while out and about, please report the sighting to the Grampian Squirrel Group, using the sightings page at www.grampiansquirrelgroup.co.uk.

For more information, please contact:

Nicola McGovern

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Tel: 0131 312 4742

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EU rules on improving the ecology of Scottish waters

Some people think few good things come from our EU membership but those concerned about their environment have welcomed one set of new rules wholeheartedly. The Water Framework Directive was adopted into Scottish law in the last few years but 2009 has seen the first fruits of that legislation. The WFD requires EU countries to assess the condition of all rivers, lochs, estuaries and inshore coastal waters and ensure they come up to a standard called good ecological status by 2015. This good ecological status is defined by the health of aquatic invertebrates, algae, plants and fish and it is a pretty rigorous standard. Where our surface waters fail to come up to this ecological benchmark then we have to do something about it. Public bodies, for example the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, have to put together a plan to achieve the target of good ecological status or explain, in some cases, why this is not possible because of over-riding economic consequences, for instance where a hydro-power dam is in place. The first such plan for Scotland has just been published and can be seen on the SEPA website:

http://www.sepa.org.uk/water/river_basin_planning.aspx

There are two River Basin Plans, one for the cross-border river catchments of the Solway and Tweed and another for the rest of Scotland. The plans set out how the Scottish Government, public agencies, industry, communities and voluntary groups will work together to take action to improve water bodies to the ecological standard required. Sometimes the rivers, lochs and coastal waters are already of such good ecological health that they exceed the EU good status standard in which case we must protect that higher quality and not let it deteriorate. The plans run for six years, to 2015, after which SEPA has to review what has been achieved and see if there are still any waters failing the standard expected by the EU. If so, these remaining problems have to be addressed in another river basin planning cycle up to 2021. However, this is not allowed to go on forever; the maximum time limit for action is until 2027.

The great thing about the River Basin Plan is that we can all have our say and contribute our own thoughts and priorities. There are ten stakeholder groups; a wider stakeholder forum and plenty of opportunity to comment on the plans through the website. I also think there is a golden opportunity to use the Plan to look at other environmental objectives such as biodiversity improvements; natural flood management and climate change adaptation because these can be delivered in parallel with the EU's ecological objectives for our surface waters. I would encourage you to look at the new plans now and comment on them. The more people participate and say what is important to them about their environment the better.

Roger Owen

AGM

Just a reminder that the AGM is on Thursday 15th April at the Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen commencing at 7:30. This will be followed by a talk by David Hetherington on "The Cairngorms Wildcat Project - saving the Highland Tiger". We do need new committee members, please think about helping with Member Centre organisation. Any nominations should be sent to Rodney Payne as soon as possible.

SWT Outing to Montrose and St Cyrus, 13 August 2009

A disappointingly small number of members gathered at the SWT Montrose Centre where the Manager, Caroline Hendry, met us. Caroline spoke to us about the Centre and then handed us over to the SWT volunteers who were to be our guides at the Centre.

We looked out of the windows and the osprey made its first appearance of the day. A peregrine falcon followed shortly after. Down in the basin there were mute swans, cormorants, eider duck, goldeneye, lapwing, turnstone, dunlin, and oyster catcher. In the Centre grounds were a collection of "small stuff", goldfinch, blackbird, starling and linnet. Bigger waders showing were curlew, redshank and godwit of both species. Out on the sandbank, 9 common seals dozed away the morning. The highlight was then spotted, a ruddy shelduck, a vagrant here.

Moving on to Old Montrose pier and walking up the river between the Slunks and the Lurgies we saw numbers of pink-footed geese and shelduck together with the more simple house sparrow and woodpigeon. There was a little egret there, but there is some disagreement whether we actually saw it or not!

The weather showing signs of rain persuaded us to lunch at the Centre in the warm and dry.

After lunch, with improving weather, we motored to St Cyrus where Alison Couch, one of the Rangers met us in their visitor Centre and spoke to the group. I get into difficulties here, as I did not take part in the walk on the reserve due to my recovering from a knee operation. However, on their return they all enthused over the birds, plants and butterflies seen.

Rodney Payne

Summer Walks / Outings 2010

Sat 8th May 2010 10.30am

Longhaven Cliffs SWT Reserve with Mike Stevens

Meet at SWT car park NK116394

Packed lunch and stout footwear

Further details/booking: Rodney Payne 01569 763742

Sat 12th June 2010 9.45 for 10.00am

Hill of Garvock

Botanical Outing with David Welch

Meet at NO738706 (small car park at the top of the B9120)

Packed lunch and stout footwear

Further details/booking: David Elston 01224 868153

Saturday 17th July 2010 10.15 for 10.30am

Aberdeen Rock Pools with Clare Scanlan

Meet at the Battery car park, Greyhope Road Torry at NJ963055

Packed lunch and stout footwear or wellies

Further details/booking: Rodney Payne 01569 763742

Sat 28th August 2010 7.30 p.m. till late

International Year Of Biodiversity Event

Moths on the Moss: Portlethen Moss (proposed Local Nature Reserve)

In conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service.

Organised in partnership with Grampian Moth Group.

Meet Southeast entrance to the Moss on Bruntland Road.

Booking essential

Further details/booking Ranger: David Potter 01569 768292

Sun Oct 3rd 2010 10.30- 12.30am

Fungal Foray with Liz Holden

Meet at Scolty Hill car park NO688948

Packed lunch optional and stout footwear

Further details/booking: Kenn Watt 01224 483065

Notes on Outings

Most outings are potentially all day, so bring waterproofs, boots or wellies, plus lunch. Map references quoted are O.S. Landranger 1:50 000 (Map number and grid reference). Booking is required for all outings on a first-come first-served basis. If insufficient people have booked by the Monday prior to the outing, it may be cancelled. When booking, please leave your contact phone number.

Raffle Prizes

The branch started running a raffle at the indoor meetings last winter. Members donated all the prizes, meaning that all the money raised went to branch funds. So if anyone would like to donate items for prizes for meetings this spring they will be greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have any suitable items. Thank you.

Gavin Forrest

Delivery of Newsletters

Every newsletter delivered by hand saves the branch the cost of a stamp. There are already a band of volunteers who deliver a bundle of newsletters in their area, whether a few streets in the city or a village in the shire. But we could do with wider coverage. So if there is anyone who would like an evening or two of exercise twice a year please contact Gavin Forrest.

Contacts for Members

SWT M C Committee	
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