

Number 103 - March 2010

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Introduction

Haven't we had a wild winter already but, as these words are written, who knows what more is to come? The SWT has coped with other storms both financial and climatic, though, and we must hope that Scotland's wildlife has managed to come through this winter's severe weather reasonably well. Populations of many of our small birds, kingfishers, deer and several other species are likely to be reduced next summer. Some of our younger members may have forgotten that winters like this weren't uncommon a decade or two back and our wildlife will recover, as it has done in the past. What will be more interesting, however, is to see what the effects have been on those animals and plants spreading north on the wings of climate change – comma and peacock butterflies, alexanders, pyramidal orchids and bearded reedlings, to name just a few. There's always such a lot to see and enjoy of our changing wildlife. Why not join us on some of the members' centre outings this summer?

Alpine Flowers

Thursday 26th November

The Dundee and South Angus Members' Group heard a fascinating talk in the Meffan Institute in Forfar in the autumn evening lecture. The topic was 'Alpine Flowers' and was delivered by that botanist-about-Europe, the very well versed and the equally well travelled and highly enthusiastic Michael Almond.

He began by describing a few of the many alpine flowers found in this country, in places like Glen Clova and Corrie Fee, Caenlochan, Ben Lawers and further afield. We were treated to succulent images of such plants as the delicate mountain avens (*Dryas octopetala*), the small purple flowers of opposite-leaved saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*), the delicate leaves of netted willow (*Salix reticulata*), the luminous yellow spheres of globeflower (*Trollius europaea*) and the vibrant blue flowers of snow gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*) and alpine forget-me-not (*Myosotis alpestris*).



Our lecturer reminded us of the riches of the alpine flora of Scotland and a few places south of the border but then extended his – and our – gaze into Europe. We saw photographs of the mountain lloydia (*Lloydia serotina*), not found in Scotland but in Snowdonia in North Wales and also in various places in the Alps. In the same way, such plants as moss campion (*Silene acaulis*) with its tight cushions and small pink flowers is common on such mountains as Ben Lawers and Ben Lui but also occurs in many of the limestone areas of the higher mountains throughout Europe. One of them was a spectacular double form of the campion, seen on a high ridge in France. We were treated to images of our own butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), compared with several alpine species including the large flowers of *P. grandiflora* and the small delicate *P. alpina*.

Mike also spent some time describing the variety of violets in Europe, starting with yellow mountain pansy (*Viola lutea*) and the common pansy on mountains (*V. tricolour*), both found in Scotland, and progressing on to *V. altaica*, *V. biflora*, *V. calcarata*, on limestone, *V. delphinantha* (from near Delphi in southern Greece) and a host of others.

We saw and heard about examples of other superb alpiners from many parts of the continent. The audience marvelled at comparisons in other groups, including bell-flowers (*Campanula* species), a few *Rhododendron* species, creeping azalea (*Loiseleuria*

procumbens), common in places on Scottish hills but photographed on Lago Bianco in Italy, a rich variety of *Anemone* and *Pulsatilla* species, lilies, a wide variety of *Primula* species and numbers of others. In fact, Mr Almond's lecture fully lived up to expectations. It was a tour de force, a great reminder of the enormous diversity of plant life to be found in Europe.

As several members said afterwards over cups of coffee, it was wonderful to see and learn about such a huge variety of alpinines; really something to look forward to next summer!

Seaton Survey

Several new wasps have turned up in Angus, specifically along Seaton cliffs. It's not bad news – and nobody is likely to be stung – but very interesting indeed! These findings are part of a first draft of the results of the hymenopteran survey, on bees and wasps, which has just been released. The work was carried out by a Scottish expert, Brian Little, as part of last year's wildlife surveys to monitor changes of specific groups in our local area. The surveys had been commissioned and organised by Trefor Woodford and Richard Brinklow of the Dundee and Angus members' group. Added up together, the results increase our knowledge of the diversity of local life, an appropriate outcome for this year. 2010, you may know, is the 'International Year of Biodiversity'.

The only way to find out what wildlife treasures we harbour here in Angus is go out and look. In the case of birds and higher plants, it's fairly easy to locate an expert who is capable of taking on the work and producing a professional report at the end of it. However, for most other groups specialists are much rarer on the ground, so to speak, and we were fortunate to be able to enlist the services of Brian and his wife.

The SWT's Seaton Cliffs reserve, just north east of Arbroath, was known to contain a rich variety of insect life, as well as fascinating plant communities and groups of breeding birds. It was worthwhile organising a survey to find out. However, most of us would just walk past new species of most groups without recognising them or, even if we could see that the insect was different, would find it very difficult to distinguish the specimens as new. That's one of the great benefits of inviting a real expert in to do the work.

And just what are these newly discovered wasp species? Well, the results will be released in full when Brian gives a talk on his survey at the AGM at the Meffan Gallery in Forfar in May. We hope to see you there.

Great News!

The latest news from the Dundee Support Group is that funding has, at last, been made available for the improvement of the Miley nature reserve in Dundee. John Whyman has done a power of work and secured a considerable sum from the Scottish Government Challenge Funds under their Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) project. The application was supported by local consultations organised by the City Council which demonstrated the need for improving the Miley path. The fund is administered and monitored by the Forestry Commission but there is a catch, though.

The scheme provides 75% of the funding for any work, not all of it. We, the SWT, will have to find the remaining quarter. The money will be spent over the next three years to



transform the rather damp and dilapidated state of the path. Once the work has been completed, local community groups and school children from schools in the area will return to the reserve to let the SWT and the Forestry Commission know how much it has been improved.

Perhaps the most important work will be to greatly improve the drainage, particularly at the north end and in the middle section. A long wheelchair ramp is to be constructed at the Clepington Road end to allow access and easy passage of wheelchairs along the Mile. Fencing will be improved, access gates modified, new information signs installed and the steps and handrail up to Harefield Road will be replaced. The plans also include the planting of a limited number of trees and better annual vegetation maintenance and damage repair. In addition, the funds provide for some new tools and items of equipment to be bought and more training of volunteers to be carried out.

By the time you read this the first contracts should have been signed and the construction is planned to be carried out at convenient times during the summer. Although the work will partly obstruct the path, the committee don't think that the Miley will be completely blocked for any length of time, perhaps at most for just a few days at a time. We hope that you will be able to admire the results and join us in walking the length of the Miley at regular intervals over the next few years. If you've never been along, you'll find it a very relaxing and peaceful place in the midst of a busy city with a surprising amount of wildlife interest at any time of year.

Dundee Group News

A change that has affected the Dundee Group committee is that their meetings have had to be moved from Camperdown House and now, thanks to Tom Harwood, are held in the Cosmopolitan Club in Ward Road. The important date that the committee is gearing up for, though, is the annual Plant Sale. This will be held on Saturday 22nd May in the Duntrune Demonstration Garden, at the east end of Dawson Park, West Ferry, starting at 10 o'clock. See you all there! If you have any green-fingered friends who you think would be interested, please spread the word and encourage them along as well.

Another new activity is a photographic competition to celebrate our local reserve, the Miley, along a stretch of the old railway line just to the north of Lochee. An excellent new leaflet describing it has been produced and is available from various sources in Dundee. Our grateful thanks are due to John Whyman, who's done an excellent job in sourcing the illustrations and putting it all together. If you don't know the reserve, here's an incentive to go along and take a look, not forgetting your camera, of course! Mary Harwood, with help from Graham Cross and others, is trying to organise a venue for the display which is scheduled for late summer. If you are interested in helping or taking part, please contact Mary or our website.

Mary Harwood also announced that this year's street collections were to be held on Saturday 10th April in Dundee city centre and, probably, on the 15th May in Broughty Ferry. Would anyone like to join in for an hour or two, particularly in Dundee? The group would be delighted to have you come along and help to promote the SWT locally. Just give Mary a call.

Forfar Loch

Saturday 29th January

Our group of 25 SWT members and friends was welcomed, on a cold but clear day, by the Ranger at Forfar Loch, Craig Borland, and two volunteer assistants, Scott McIntosh and Ewan Cunningham. Our chairman, James Ivory, arrived and soon after Alban Houghton, standing in for Liz as leader, guided us over towards the loch. We soon saw that parts at the west end were frozen but much of the water further along was ice-free.

Flocks of ducks out on the loch were closely inspected and found to contain mallards in abundance and smaller numbers of tufted ducks, widgeons, a few pochards and a scattering of handsome golden-eyes. Nearer in towards the reed beds were numbers of teal, notable by their whistling calls. What

we were looking for though, was a smew. One of these very handsome diving ducks, mostly white but with black trimmings, had been noted by Craig only a few days previously but none could be seen anywhere near the Centre. Would we be lucky enough to see one further along?

Suddenly someone called out "There's a kingfisher!" and Ian Baird and a few others were quick enough to catch a glimpse of a blue flash as it disappeared. The bird had been perching on one of the trees on a small headland in front of us and had flown up the loch. What other treasures were likely to turn up?

Further down the loch we could see loose groups of pink feet geese. Skulking close in to the far shore were several goosanders that bobbed up and dived again in the manner of their kind. The fishing seemed to be good. As usual, there was much to attract attention. A short way along we spent a few minutes looking at the spectacular damage to a field beside the road. The recent heavy rain had excavated a long narrow trench across the bare ground and deposited the sand and silt on the flat ground below. It formed a sobering reminder of the tremendous power exerted by flowing water.



A little further along the north side of the loch Stevie and Jim found some fungi on fallen elder stems. It was soon identified as 'wood ears' (*Auricularia judaica*), a fairly common species – and edible too, although nobody fancied sampling it! Meanwhile, Margaret and others kept looking out along the track and over the loch for birds of interest. A variety of blackbirds, blue and great tits and the occasional thrush flitted in and out of the small trees. At the far end recent flooding forced a diversion away from the water and the noise of the traffic on the by-pass became almost deafening as we quickly rounded the end and crossed the stream gently exiting the loch.

Alban called us over to see a handsome male bullfinch low in the branches of hawthorn bush. Colin and Christina and several others were all able to get good clear views. The several telescopes lugged along the path at last proved their worth. However, while we were all distracted, Barry Crawshaw announced that he'd caught another glimpse of the kingfisher as it shot past the group. Missed it again! Ah well, there'll be another day.

The meeting ended with a meal in Forfar. The food was much anticipated after our morning's exercise and greatly appreciated when we arrived there.

Dates for your Diary

Members' Centres Events

Thursday 18th March	<i>Whales & Dolphins in the 21st Century</i> : Talk by Ian Cumming, Photographer & Naturalist. 7:30pm at Meffan Gallery, East High St., Forfar. Admission £3.50
Thursday 22nd April	<i>Creepie Crawlies on the Cliffs</i> : (Arbroath Insect Survey), talk by Brian Little. Following Annual General Meeting. 7:30pm at Meffan Gallery, East High St. Forfar.
Sunday 25th April	<i>Dawn Chorus at Barry Mill</i> : Led by Peter Ellis, Warden & Ian Baird, Meet at 5am at Barry Mill (NO 534 349) Approx. 2hrs.
Saturday 1st May	<i>Montrose Coffee Morning</i> : 10-12am. Old & St Andrews Church Hall, High St Montrose.
Saturday 22nd May	<i>Dundee Plant Sale</i> : 10.30am -3pm at the Demonstration Gardens, Dawson Park, Arbroath Rd. Dundee
Sunday 13th June	<i>Wildlife Week Walk round Balgavies Loch</i> : Led by Hugh Ingram & Alban Houghton for birds and flowers. Meet at hide car park at 2pm. (NO 529 509) Approx 2hrs.
Sunday 4th July	<i>Visit to Dumbarnie Links Reserve</i> : Led by Gordon Corbet & Brian Ballinger. Meet at 11am car park off Main St. Lower Largo (NO 422 026) Approx 4hrs. Bring lunch, waterproofs.
Sunday 8th August	<i>Barry Buddon Joint Outing</i> : Led by Bob McCurley & Jim Cook. Meet at 10am at Car Park at Monifieth Playing fields (NO 503 324). Bring Lunch Approx 5-6 hrs.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre Events

Full details of events can be found on www.swt.org.uk or www.montrosebasin.org.uk on the MBVC pages.

Wednesday 24th March	<i>Digiscoping Workshop</i> 10:30am – 5pm
Wednesday 7th April	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Sea shells on the sea shore 10:30am – 12:30pm
Sunday 11th April	<i>Tsunami Revisited</i> . A guided tour to see evidence of a Tsunami. 9:30am – 11:30am
Wednesday 14th April	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Bugs & Beasties 10:30 – 12.:30
Wednesday 5th May	<i>Spring along Seaton Cliffs</i> – Guided walk. Meet at car park at the Whiting Ness end of Victoria Park, Arbroath. 9:30am – Noon
Sat 15th & Sun 16th May	<i>Optical Fair</i> 10:30am – 5pm
Sunday 13th June	<i>Family walk</i> – Walk along part of Seaton Cliffs. Meet car park at the Whiting Ness end of Victoria Park, Arbroath 1:30 – 3pm
Wednesday 16th June	<i>Re-tern to Montrose</i> – Guided walk 1:30pm – 3pm. Montrose beach pavilion
Sunday June 20th	<i>A short guided walk on the reserve</i> . Car park at Old Montrose Pier/Lurgies. 11am – 1:30pm
Wednesday 7th July	<i>Digiscoping Workshop</i> 10:30am – 5pm
Wednesday 7th July	<i>Tayock Transformation</i> - guided walk along this newly transformed area. 11am – 1pm
Wednesday 14th July	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Mud Glorious Mud! – 10:30am – 12:30
Wednesday 21st July	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Pondamonium –10:30am – 12:30pm
Wednesday 28th July	<i>Baywatch</i> – Guided nature walk from Ferryden to Scurdiness Lighthouse. Meet at William Street car park, Ferryden. 10am – 11:30am
Wednesday 28th July	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Rockpool Ramble – Meet at North end of Victoria Park, Arbroath 10:30am – 12:30pm
Wednesday 4th August	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Pollinator Patrol – 10:30am –12:30pm
Wednesday 11th August	<i>Children's Activities</i> – Clever Camouflage – 10:30am –12:30pm
Saturday 14th August	<i>Journey to the centre of the mud</i> – Old Mill car park, Mains of Dun. 10am – 2:30pm
Sunday 22nd August	<i>Family Fun</i> – Tree-mendous Trees – 10:30am – 5pm



(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

August 2010 - Newsletter Copy Deadline - 4th June 2010

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for August 2010 to December 2010 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

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