

PERTH CENTRE NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2010

Charity No. SC005792

This newsletter of the Perth Members Centre is the best means we have for welcoming new members to the SWT and to Perth. A further welcome awaits you at any of our meetings; we would be delighted if there was something of interest to you; we would be delighted if you contacted us if there isn't! Come along and meet other members; it is a joy, I find, just to be able to indulge in spending time talking about one's favourite things, especially if the real thing is more difficult to find, perhaps through constraints on time, season or distance.

A TREETISE

Some of Scotland's fine sights and wildlife is all around us and can be, and is, appreciated and enjoyed by all. This seems to be never more the case than in spring and was never more so than this year. After a hard winter, when spring finally arrived after persistently cold conditions in March, were some displays brighter than usual? Suddenly, amidst a landscape still largely brown of bare ground and bare branches, the bird cherries flowered in a burst of white light, flowers put forth before any leaf. As they faded, blackthorn similarly flowered before leaf appeared. Finally, we waited for the appearance of the hawthorn blossom. This year in the cold days of May, the old saw seemed never more appropriate, '*Cast ne'er a clout, ere May is out.*' Other trees flower more discreetly, such as the ash, and others amidst a slow greening of the boughs, willows and sycamore. Through May the bright and vivid translucent greens rapidly give way to a darker, massed foliage, so that in a remarkably short space of time what had been that bare ground and bare branches is covered in luxuriant growth. Last of all are the oak and alder. It is as though the oak anticipates a long and hard life and bides its time in avoiding the wild excesses of a lively youth and early displays. Perthshire is noted as the Big tree Country; for a little while, at least, the numerous and smaller deciduous trees grab the attention from exotic conifers. But, whatever, we can enjoy the variety of trees that we have got. *Jeff Banks*

REMINDER

We are now unable to send out Membership cards with the Wildlife magazine. Details of our programme can be found in this newsletter and in the 'Events and Activities' booklet

SWIFT RETURNS

The first swifts I saw in Scone this year were on May 4 but they may have returned earlier. They were screaming in their nest site at Queens Road on May 15 with small parties of screamers round the houses when the weather picked up mid month. A party of seven screamers was seen at Almondbank on May 16 and ten on June 4. Although numbers appear to be down this year a party of 20-25 screamers was above Scone on June 29 and another party of 20-30 was high up in the same area on July 8. *Charlie Macpherson*

OTTER SEEN ON EAST POW

While undertaking a farmland bird survey at Mains of Cultmalundie Farm during April I was amazed and thrilled to spot an otter swimming quite casually down stream on the East Pow. The survey is part of the RSPB Volunteer Farmer Alliance initiative. *Charlie Macpherson*

PROGRAMME FOR INDOOR SEASON

Friday, 8th October - Red Squirrels - Ken Neil (Tayside Squirrel officer).

Friday, 5th November - To be arranged.

Friday 3rd December - Photographing Local Wildlife - Fergus/ Lorne Gill. Joint meeting with PSNS in Perth Museum and Art Gallery

Friday, 14th January - To be arranged.

Friday, 18th February - To be arranged.

Friday, 18th March - To be arranged.

All meetings other than 3rd December to be held in the Luncarty Church Centre, starting at 7.30 p.m.

KELTNEYBURN GEMS ON JUNE OUTING

This is a gem of a reserve, and the visit on this warm Sunday in June presented some treats. The flowers were in profusion, being the the time of year when late 'early' flowers were just passed their peak but still present, and later flowering plants were beginning to appear. Add an interest in the numerous dragonflies and damselflies, some 'caught' emerging from the pupal cases, and the smaller butterflies and moths, and there was much of interest in the day.

25TH APRIL 2010

It's a very heavy start to the day the famous Scotch Mist no less. A honking from above and after a little sky searching what I see is a very large skein of around 250 Geese, heading north-west not the regular V you would expect but a sort of jumble, that turns in to lines and then small little clusters. The general muddle turns into a few smaller V shapes as they fly out of my view. The usual Chaffinch are singing and chinking while a Song Thrush adds a touch of class to the morning vocals. A few high flying Black Headed Gulls disturb the gentle tones with their shrieking racket.

First stop today Faskally, Mallard, and Tufted Duck, dabble and dive respectively, the bright white shape out in the centre is a Drake Goosander. From a line of trees to my right a Great Spotted Woodpecker drums. Over on the far side a Peacock echo's across the water. For the second time this morning the sound of Geese this lot seem a little more organised as they head due north, this skein holds around 200 birds. The hazy morning has covered a few of the higher hill tops. Scanning over the mud bank I find a Common Sandpiper, two Black Headed Gulls, which I try to ignore and return to the Sandpiper, must be my lucky day I find a second Sandpiper at the other end of the mud bank. Looking skyward after hearing the honking of Geese, there is certainly a lot of traffic this morning this third group holds around 150 birds, they are also heading due north.

The Cuilc is yet again very quiet, a small skein of around 50 Geese heading north-west make a brief appearance through the trees, must be the stragglers trying to catch up with the earlier lot. The female Swan is sat on the nest while the male is just on station close by. Three Mallard all male rest up at the west end of the Cuilc, two more are sitting it out in the north-east corner. No one else is home. The heavy morning is now taking a grip of Ben-Y-Vrackie. In the trees a Willow Warbler, over the Golf Course Oystercatcher start their piping, the noise level increasing as their numbers increase. Blue Tit, flutter about and Chaffinch chase and chink all around me at one point two birds almost crashing into me. I could feel the feathers as they flashed past, or rather round me, well almost through me.

The rattling from a hollow tree tells me the Great Spotted Woodpecker is in attendance, as I concentrate on the direction of the sound it soon becomes obvious that there are two birds, I do get to see one of them, a male on the tree I have heard him drum from on many an occasion the second bird I did not get to see. A drumming from a little further away makes me wonder about the possibility of a third bird. Great Tit call to mark out their territory. Willow Warblers are also present. A Blackbird bursts into song only to be drowned out by some noisy Black Headed Gulls and a Carrion Crow.

Up on the Moor my first sighting of the morning is a Red Legged Partridge, who is standing in the middle of the road. The bird is or at least appears to be unconcerned as my vehicle bears down on it. I stop and only then does it start to leg it. Moving to one side as I slowly pass, looking in my rear view mirror I see it retuning to the middle of the road. A little further down the road a Curlew flies across the road and parks neatly in perfect view just off to my right. I slowly drive by and head on toward to Lec. On a large rock in front of the lay by stands a Wheatear, on the ground next to the rock a Pied Wagtail. As I park up the Wheatear, a male, just looks and takes what seems like an age before it decides to fly off, a second male takes to the wing at the same time, they do not move far away. I set up my scope and focus on the Lec. Five Black Grouse stand ready for combat.

A commotion from the old Oak tree, that for several years now has been home to a pair of Carrion Crow, takes my gaze away from the Lec. I can see two nests the resident crows and an extremely noisy Kestrel, the Crows stand their ground, or perhaps their tree and the Kestrel a male leaves. I'm not sure what is was all about the conclusion though was not in doubt, Crows win, Kestrel lost. Curlew calls are all round the Moor and the sound of the Grouse squabbles can be heard from the Lec. On a post nearby a Wheatear calls, just out of focus behind him a female stands on a rock, dropping down onto the ground to pick up a small insect, before returning to the top of the rock. The Grouse have all gone by the time I look back to the Lec. A Meadow Pipit flies past as I head in the homeward direction. To my delight as I drive back I find two Black Grouse facing each other next to the main road, I stop in a nearby lay by and find in total five birds, likely the bunch that have just left the Lec. I make one further stop on the Moor, and get treated to a Song Thrush singing his heart out.

A quick visit back to the Cuilc just for one last look and it is obvious that nothing has changed. so I head back to Faskally. Looking out over the mud bank in the background flying low over the water are Swallows and Sand Martins. They fly so skilfully skimming across the surface as if tempting fate, sometimes maybe gently touching the water yet never failing to negotiate each other the water or the occasional half submerged tree branches as they hawk for the insects they will need to refuel after their long migration flight. I suspect the heavy morning means the insects are keeping closer to the water surface. Two Common Sandpipers now fly in a zigzag, then a more direct flight, then another zigzag, they fly just above the water, they head away and off towards the main river. Then suddenly they part company one going up river the second down river. They are soon both gone. Back on the mud bank my two Sandpipers are still there. On the far bank I find two Oystercatcher. Closer to me my movement disturbs a Carrion Crow and a few Chaffinch. A pair of Widgeon fly across the mud bank coming to a controlled splash landing before joining the Mallard in a little dabbling session. It looks as if rain could be on the way, so I head for home. *Mike Conlon.*

SWT PERTHSHIRE CONTACTS

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BAD NEWS – Members are reminded that we incur costs for the use of the Luncarty Church Centre - please be generous with your donations!