



1. Membership

The local membership has remained stable with 684 households in 2020 to 682 households in 2021. This equates to 1,226 members spread over 682 memberships.

2. An interesting first year for Guy, our new chair

In April 2020, after 20 years in the role, Roy Sexton stepped down as chair of our local group.

When I put my name forward to be considered as chair of the group, I knew that I had a hard act to follow but I didn't expect to also have to confront the issues presented by Covid.

I had high hopes of getting out onto our reserves, undertaking valuable survey work and helping others to appreciate our wonderful natural environment. Unfortunately, Covid put a halt to most of these activities. Even our AGM and committee meetings have been held on Zoom.

You'll notice that this newsletter is missing key sections where we would normally tell you about the practical conservation tasks our volunteers have completed, our surveys of local and national priority species and the biological records submitted to national databases. I truly hope that it will not be too long until restrictions ease and our members and volunteers are able and willing to get back outdoors and take part in these valuable activities. There will certainly be a good deal of catching up to do.

3. Our award-winning committee members

The SWT's Trustees' Awards for Volunteering celebrate the contribution of volunteers to the work of the Trust.

Our committee members dominated the Awards for 2020 with Roy Sexton receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of the time he has dedicated over the past 20 years to voluntary work on behalf of the Trust in the Stirling area and for his unflinching love of nature.



Lifetime achievement recipient Roy



Group award – young leaders and Young volunteer award recipient Ally

And Alasdair Lemon receiving a Young Leaders – Group Award as well as receiving the Trust's Young Volunteer Award. The award recognises Ally's dedication to the protection of Scotland's nature and wildlife and that his contributions are outstanding given his young age.

You can find out more about these awards at <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/trustees-awards-for-volunteering-2020/>

4. Winter talks

Covid forced us to make a significant change to the way we held our winter talks programme for 2020-2021. The various restrictions and lockdowns that were in place meant that our talks were held online using Zoom, which was a steep learning curve for us and many of the speakers.

Our first four talks were held using the SWT HQ's Zoom webinar subscription and covered topics that did not necessarily have a central Scotland focus. These talks are available to view on the [SWT YouTube](#) channel.

To test the waters our new vice-chair Chris Cathrine volunteered to give the first talk, our October talk, on 'Amphibians and Reptiles in Scotland'. The technology worked well and the talk was attended by 278 people.

Our November talk was presented by Owen Selly who spoke about the 'East Scotland Sea Eagles Reintroduction Project'. The SWT Zoom Webinar is limited to 500 people and Owen's talk reached the limit, meaning that some people were unable to attend as 681 people registered for the event. The video of the talk has since been viewed over 800 times on the SWT YouTube channel.

Then in December 80 people logged on to the talk by Tom Bowser on 'Nature Friendly Farming'.

The first talk of 2021, held on 5th January, was attended by 397 people who tuned in to see Dr Greg Kenicer's talk entitled 'From Magic to Medicine: Scottish Vernacular Plant Medicine'.

Our final two talks of the programme were hosted using our group's Zoom meeting subscription. While attendees may have had a similar experience, the committee had to learn a new set of skills to deal with the subtle differences in functionality. These talks had a local focus, similar to those that we would have held if we had been able to host the talks at our usual venue.

In February Roy Sexton gave a talk on 'The impact of gardening on Scottish wildflowers', using many local examples, which 40 people attended. And for our final talk in March 80 people watched Melissa Shaw's talk about 'Bogs for Bugs' and the peatland restoration work taking place in central Scotland. Melissa's talk is available to view on [Buglife's YouTube](#) channel.

Thanks go to the speakers, SWT HQ and my fellow committee members for working through the challenges that the technology presented and delivering a very successful programme of talks. The numbers attending the talks ranged from 40 to 500, seemingly dependant on whether the talk was publicised locally or by SWT HQ. The talks programme reached a far wider and larger audience than our indoor meetings. Although some local members had some difficulty getting on to Zoom and missed the social interaction of our usual meetings, there have been many positive comments in response to our email to members.

We will soon begin to think about our winter talks programme for 2021-2022. While we hope we will have the option of holding meetings at a suitable venue we cannot be certain. We will be looking into a range of options including continuing to use Zoom. We would love to get your feedback on our Zoom talks and thoughts and preferences for our next talks programme.



A screenshot from Chris Cathrine's trailblazing talk



A screenshot from Owen Selly's very popular talk

5. Our Cambus Pools Nature Reserve

Our nature reserve at the mouth of the River Devon has become very popular during the Covid 19 restrictions. On a dull Sunday at the end of March between 11 am to 1 pm 83 people visited the reserve (plus 23 dogs). The recent upgrade of the tracks has encouraged young families, the elderly and cyclists. Amongst them were 3 litter pickers who are part of the local volunteers who help look after the reserve as well as keeping wildlife records. Our SWT Group also trim all 2 km of track side verges to encourage the smaller flowering plants which provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, hoverflies and other wildlife. Up until 2001 we had no orchids on the reserve but last year the tally had increased to 4 species. The original 40 devil's-bit scabious plants which we grew from seed and planted for autumn nectar in 2014 produced nearly 2000 flowers in 2020.

Amongst the 83 visitors were also four naturalists two of whom had just seen the rare Marsh Harriers 2 km down the Forth over our Tullibody Inch reed bed reserve where we hope they will breed. The other two naturalists were preparing the area where they will ring migratory warblers when they return from sub-Saharan Africa to breed. In 2020, 445 birds were ringed and we are looking forward to seeing how many return in 2021. We would also like to thank those patient wildlife photographers who have produced a fantastic library of wildlife pictures from in and around the reserve.



Clockwise from top left: The water rail and kingfisher were taken by Ian Bone and his wife. The young otters and goosander with chicks were taken by Phillip Jones

6. The work of our planning team

Our Team continues to work hard across our area on **Local Authority Planning Applications and new Forestry Proposals**. We always respond to applications / proposals when there is potential adverse impact on biodiversity and use all opportunities where we can recommend good practice that is helpful to biodiversity. We give priority to responding at the earliest stages of applications / proposals, as this is when we can have the most impact.

We also respond to a range of **Public Consultations**, for example to the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework No 4, on UKWAS (a Quality Assurance Certification Scheme for Forestry) and there will be one soon on the UKFS (the Regulations for Forestry work in Scotland). This is another route to increasing our impact.

These days we organise more of **our own training**, although we still get occasional training input from SWT HQ, which is always welcome. We have organised training for ourselves on:

1. Using a variety of online resources to improve the quality of our responses, for example the NBN Atlas (Scotland) and SEPA's Water Classification Hub
2. A range of 'green' and 'blue' issues relevant to Planning Applications, and we have now created our own Team resource bank of good green and blue links to selectively include within responses.

We have a training event half lined-up from Bat Conservation Trust, though on the backburner at the moment because of Covid and its impact, to better inform our bat-related work. In the meantime, we use resources on their website to help us.

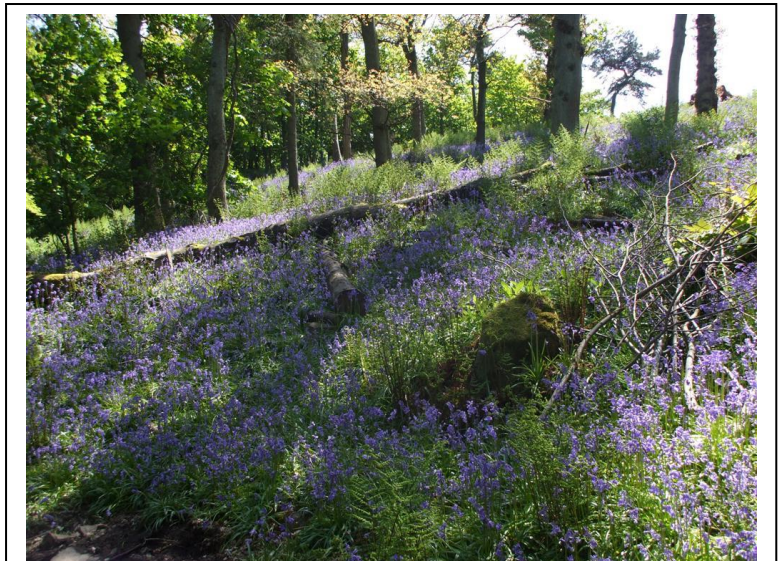
Regarding Forestry proposals, we were successful in getting a commitment in writing from Scottish Forestry that **Priority Habitats and Priority Species on the Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL)** will be taken into consideration in their decision-making, so familiarity with the SBL has become more central to our work, and we highlight SBL issues in our responses whenever relevant. We have had success in getting onto the list of Non-Statutory Consultees of some Forestry Companies and some Forest Agents, which means we get early alerts about Proposals.

We are always looking at other ways to make connections and gain skills and influence. Currently, we have connected with a group based in Dumfries and Galloway called Communities for Diverse Forestry. We are hoping to share ideas, knowledge and resources with them to mutual benefit, but it is too soon yet to know how this will work out.

It is great working in a really good team and sincere thanks go to all members of the Team for their contributions to our work. Many of us started as novices, though some of us are expert. We use everyone in the team's strengths to give as rounded a quality of output as possible. Inevitably, we are not always as successful as we would like, but we do our very best and sometimes achieve good outcomes.

Equally, we are always interested in new members for our Planning Team. All you need is an interest in conserving wildlife in our area, basic IT skills, and a willingness to learn. Experience using maps is a help. If you are interested in finding out more, or in joining our team, please use 'Contact Us' on our website and we will get back in touch as soon as we can.

<https://www.swtstirling.org.uk/contact-us>.



For example, through our comments on forestry proposals we seek to minimise any potential impacts on ancient woodland.

7. Local Nature Conservation Sites

The SWT, both nationally and locally, have been involved with promoting and designating sites that are of local importance for nature for many years. Locally designated sites have been called Listed Wildlife Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and the current designation is Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS). LNCS are designated by the local planning authority which in our area are Stirling Council, Clackmannanshire Council and the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority.

LNCS identify locally important natural heritage that could be damaged by development. There are actually two categories of LNCS:

- Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS)
- Local Geodiversity Sites (LGS)

In Stirling and Clackmannanshire, we are working with our local biological records centre TWIC (The Wildlife Information Centre) to survey and assess Local Biodiversity Sites. TWIC play a key role in the LNCS process as they coordinate the LNCS volunteer group, of which we are a member, they collate and assess the biological data for each proposed site and, following agreement by the LNCS group, pass a recommendation to the relevant Council.

The volunteers have been working hard over the past few years and there is a good number of LNCS sites, 20 in Clackmannanshire and 17 in Stirling, that have been assessed and are sitting with the planning authorities awaiting designation. We have been working with the Councils to get these sites designated.

8. Web Site and social media

Our online presence has become even more important during the past year as restrictions on movement and social interaction have severely limited in person communication. Our group's website <http://www.swtstirling.org.uk/> has kept members and non-members informed of our online talks and AGM as well as current campaigns and volunteer opportunities.

This information is also posted on our [facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages along with lots interesting facts. Our website, facebook and Twitter pages are the best places to go to find out about our activities. My thanks go to our dedicated committee members who keep these up to date.

9. The Committee

Thanks are due for the enormous amount of work done by the committee as well as the many other SWT members who have helped during the year. Of particular significance is the retirement of Jacky Robinson who joined the committee in 2018 and took on the role of Minutes Secretary.

Chair	Guy Harewood
Vice-chair	Chris Cathrine
Treasurer, Planning Team	Liz Albert
Group Secretary	Ally Lemon
Minutes Secretary	Jacky Robinson
Meetings Venue Organiser and Website	Jan Harbidge
Moth Group Organiser	Tony Rogers
IT Advisor and Mammal Group Convenor	Gabi Rice-Grunert
Facebook Organiser	Melissa Shaw
Cambus Pools Reserve Convenor	Roy Sexton
Committee member	Michael Christie
Committee member	Tom Palmer
Committee member	Stuart Bence