


SWT Galloway Group Newsletter – June 2017		 Scottish Wildlife Trust
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Welcome to the June Edition of the Galloway SWT Newsletter.

Summer Events

This year we have chosen to publicise our Summer Programme by using email, Facebook and the SWT website, rather than by more traditional methods. By the time this Newsletter reaches your doormat, you should already have been made aware of our Conservation Day at Carstramon in early June and the farm tour and visit to the Southwick Coast later in the same month. We will let you know how we got on at both of these events in our next Newsletter. However, we are also planning an event at Knowetop Lochs on Wednesday 2nd August, so watch out for this.

If you would like to keep in touch, then you can request that we add you to our distribution list by sending an email to swtgalloway@gmail.com, or visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/swtgalloway.

Winter Programme 2017

We have arranged the following talks for the first part of our Winter Programme. All are welcome (members & non-members) and donations appreciated.

All meetings take place in the Gordon Memorial Hall, St Ninians Church, Castle Douglas, at 7:30 pm. St Ninians is in Whitepark Road, Castle Douglas. DG7 1EX.

Wed 4 th Oct 2017	The Scottish Wildcat	A talk by Lindsay MacKinley on this iconic Scottish animal and the steps that are being taken to preserve it. Lindsay is a past member of the Scottish Wildcat Steering Group and Scottish Wildcat Action Group.
Wed 1 st Nov 2017	The Living Landscapes Project	A talk by Ian MacKenzie about the progress of this ambitious project in Coigach Assynt, Cumbernauld and Edinburgh, and plans for the future. Ian is Project Manager of the SWT Living Landscapes Project
Wed 6 th Dec 2017	Native Freshwater Fish in SW Scotland	A talk by Dr Andy Ferguson about the fish that live in our rivers and lochs, their social, economic and biodiversity importance to the region, and some of the problems that they face. Andy is Professor Emeritus at Queen's University Belfast and has now retired to Galloway.

Local Development Plan

The first major consultation phase of the latest Local Development Plan (LDP) for Dumfries & Galloway was completed at the end of May, following the publication of the Main Issues Report earlier in the year. I'm pleased to say that we were able to put together a reasoned response to this document based on input from our members. The Council did a thorough job in compiling this report and, in the main, the proposals were thoughtful and sensible. There were, of course, some exceptions to this which, I hope, we were able to highlight in our response.

The next consultation phase takes place in January 2018 with the draft publication of the Proposed Plan. This is the last opportunity to make any changes to the next LDP, which will be the basis of planning for the next five years and many more. We will, of course review this document in detail and will call upon you (our members) to highlight any issues that you find. Thanks for your help.

Graham Smith (Chairman)

News from Our Reserves

Carsegowan Moss

Yes, the ospreys have returned. The female, I believe, has been sitting on egg(s) since the 14th or 15th April, giving an anticipated hatching date of 22nd May; watch out for a report in the next Newsletter.

Prior to the arrival of the ospreys, Chris Archbald and his team constructed a superb viewing platform providing an excellent view over much of the reserve as well as installing a seating bench along with one of the new Reserve Display Boards organised by Graham Smith.

I am aware there have been a fair number of visitors to the Visitor Viewing Point (VVP), all of whom I gather have behaved responsibly, as one would hope and expect. The best time to visit the VVP, I would suggest, is sometime after mid-June, late-ish in the afternoon, with the sun behind you; the juveniles will be starting their wing strengthening, then the flying practice. Well worth watching, I can assure you.

Perhaps a Galloway Group visit could be arranged sometime in mid-July?

As we all know, in the last few months there has been very little rain. Carsegowan April rainfall being only 16.3mm, that in turn has made the bog much drier as well as reducing the water levels in the ponds behind the new bunding.

With the ospreys in residence, access onto the reserve is severely restricted. However, I have noticed damsel and dragonflies along with other insects in the few places I can visit; this seems to be earlier than usual, leaving me wondering what else we may be missing.

Euan D Macdonald (Convenor)

Carstramon Wood

The early (warm) signs were that our bluebell-fest would be earlier this year than last, and so it was. They have been looking and smelling spectacular since late April, perhaps because there was no rain at all for a month prior to mid-May. With the average annual rainfall for the reserve at 2000mm (6.5 inches a month), we are going to need some wet months ahead to make that up! Now the migrant birds are back, and with them the migrant ornithologists (Brian Smith, John Skilling and team) to check their 131 nest boxes for pied flycatchers, blue and great tits, and perhaps the odd nuthatch or redstart brood. There are occasional but persistent sightings of grey squirrels crossing the road beneath the reserve, but mercifully no sign of any young so far (or in previous years). The habitat is absolutely ideal for greys, so we must be forever watchful. My recent attempt to trap one after a sighting got no further than pre-baiting two traps with the doors locked open and trail-cams trained on them. I recorded visits from many songbirds, roe deer, a badger, a rat and even an otter, as well as red squirrels, but no greys!

Peter Garson (Convenor)

Knowetop Lochs

Chris Archbold and his team have been busy at Knowetop this year. Their first job was to deal with the pile of trees which were felled last year on the northern boundary of the Reserve. These were planted by Mr and Mrs Stewart who originally owned the Reserve 40 years ago. They provided a useful shelter belt for the Reserve but had the annoying habit of falling over across the road and damaging the adjacent telephone wires. So it was decided to fell the line of trees closest to the road and leave a narrow line of trees on the northern boundary to provide some shelter and protection.

During the Winter Chris brought in a mobile power-saw to deal with the fallen trees and, hopefully, create something useful. The primary target was to tackle the larch wood, which is particularly strong and weather-resistant, in order to create material for new boardwalks at Knowetop and other reserves in Dumfries and Galloway. The mature larch trees were used to create the long straight "runners" to support the length of the boardwalk and the smaller trees were used to create long, strong poles, to be driven into the boggy ground as the main foundation of the boardwalk.

The second job was to create a new boardwalk near the entrance to the reserve to withstand the flooding when the Barlay Burn overflows. It was nice to see the locally-harvested wood being used. Chris was helped by a small team of ecology students from around the country, including one student from France. And they did a great job! The new boardwalk is much higher than before and looks to be very strong and resilient. The good news is that there is still plenty of wood to harvest, and I'm told that some has already been used to create new boardwalks at Carsegowan. My thanks to Chris and his team for doing such a great job!

Graham Smith (Convenor)

Southwick - the return of a native

A bird has bred in Southwick Coast Reserve for the first time since 1972. Our returning native is the raven (*Corvus corax*) which has increased its numbers across the region over the last twenty years. Local expert Richard Mearns confirms that he personally had never witnessed nesting at this traditional site. As I write, at least three chicks are ready to fledge and should soon enhance the sights and sounds of the reserve as they gambol in the air with their parents. Although ravens are long lived birds, having few persecutors apart from Man, it is highly unlikely that the new pair could be anything more than descendants of the former nesters at this site.

Ravens nest locally on cliffs and in trees but always have an element of inaccessibility of their chosen site. A pair has nested in Carstramon Wood in all the years of my visits which cover 20 years. Once the young feel independent they will leave the parental home and join other birds to form winter roosts numbering many birds so should be looked out for and preferably reported.

Please remember that often the best birds are seen by non-birdwatchers and usually not reported. Please send your sightings of wildlife to DGERC run by Mark Pollitt.

Brian Smith (Convenor)

Finally - Six desirable woodland homes, free to the right mammal!

Following reports and sightings over the last year or two of pine martens in close proximity to two of the SWT reserves, it was decided that we would provide a number of boxes dotted through Blackcraig Wood and Carstramon Wood just in case these elusive and canny predators might have need of some additional denning sites. Both Blackcraig and Carstramon have some natural denning sites in rocky craigs or rot holes in big old trees, but providing boxes creates a better opportunity for us to view the box with binoculars from a distance to avoid disturbing these shy animals, looking for signs of scat and discarded bits of prey left on the tops of the boxes. (This said, a box in the Galloway Forest with a completely clean roof was found to contain three kits this year by the team monitoring martens there.). Chris Archbold and the team fashioned our boxes from plywood, recycling a few of the old reserve signs in the process, and then with the kind assistance of Gareth Ventress (Forestry Commission Scotland) and Peter Garson, the boxes were installed in the early spring of this year.

The best indication of whether the martens are using the Trust sites regularly would be the presence of scats, often left on the paths. These scats are normally 8-12cm long, a bit twisted with a sweet scent, and

can be quite variable in appearance, with three quarters of the marten diet comprising small mammals, birds and invertebrates, but they'll also take carrion and fruit and berries.

We will monitor the boxes periodically and will let you know if we do pick up any signs. Please do let us know if you find any pine marten scat on the paths in the woods.

Steve Blow (Reserve Manager) with the assistance of Peter Garson (Convenor, Carstramon Wood)

Many thanks to all contributors. Please send any articles for future issues to the editor, Richard Middleton, at our email, swtgalloway@gmail.com. The deadline for the next issue will be at the end of September.