



## SWT Aberdeen Newsletter Spring Summer 2023



<http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/>

### Chairman's Message

As I said at the local group AGM recently this year is going to be a pretty exciting one for us. We will be offering a lot of practical volunteering opportunities to our members, just as many of you asked for in the member survey we conducted at the end of last year. For a start members will be able to take part in reserve management activities organised by our new seasonal ranger, Zachery Brown. We are also keen to offer skills training in wildlife identification and recording as well as volunteer interaction with schools and young people. Read the Ranging for Nature article in this newsletter to see more on these opportunities. Some other activities on our radar include making videos of our local reserves with the convenors giving us virtual tours, participating in bio-blitz events, and hosting the national Trust AGM in Aberdeen this September!

Your local group committee organises all these activities as well as keeping you in touch through our FaceBook page, website and newsletters. But we would welcome one or two more committee members to help us. We only ask for a little of your time – whatever you have to spare. Please consider joining us!

Have you thought of becoming a trained First Aider? We need a First Aider on our outside group events and a bigger pool of them would mean we have more chance of having one along. The Trust will provide you with free training in Aberdeen. Please let us know if you are interested.

Enjoy this really interesting newsletter and we would welcome contributions from members on where you have been, the wildlife you have seen or issues you want to raise.

**Roger Owen**

### Woodland Trust Scotland

*Woodland Trust Scotland only has one site of its own in the North-east, but the charity is having a huge impact on the Aberdeenshire landscape in other ways. PR Officer George Anderson reveals more.*

The Woodland Trust has a nice simple mission – look after the native woods we have and create more of them. The country and the world is facing a climate emergency and a nature crisis. Woodland creation is one of the simplest and most effective ways to fight back on both fronts.

The Trust has over 1000 woods of its own across the UK, with sixty in Scotland. [Den Wood](#) at Oldmeldrum is our only site in the North-east. Across 18 hectares, it boasts 23 tree species, an intricate mixture of knolls and hollows to explore, and a spectacular viewpoint over the surrounding farmland to Bennachie. Damp hollows create ideal conditions for species such as beefsteak fungus and honey fungus. Recently the site took a pounding from Arwen and the other storms that followed. The site is no stranger to big winds and was likely flattened entirely during the great gales of 1953.



**Den Wood**



**New native planting Glaschul Hill Kildrummy**

60ha on lower lying farmland. 60ha of clear-felled non-native conifers have been replaced with native broadleaves.

Kildrummy on the Don near Alford was once notorious as the only Scottish estate to have a gamekeeper jailed for raptor persecution. New owners Chris and Camille Bentley have a quite different vision - rewilding. The Trust's Alan Crawford is heavily involved in helping them achieve this. He has been advising on woodland creation, restructuring commercial plantations into native woods, and transforming a grouse moor into a mosaic of wooded and open habitats. There has been river restoration work too, with the re-meandering of burns and the introduction of felled trees to create fishy hiding places and biodiversity-boosting woody debris. Allan has overseen 120ha of woodland creation so far at Kildrummy, including

Elsewhere the Trust's advisors help farmers and landowners draw up plans for native woodland creation, and hold their hands through the Forestry Grant Scheme process. There have been a couple of recent schemes around Haugh of Glass near Huntly and more are on the cards at Craigie and Inverurie. We are also helping with a rewilding project at Wardhillock near White Cairns, Kingseat where a wetland is being created and native tree planting will follow this autumn.

Managers of the Dee and Don river systems increasingly seek our help. Rising water temperatures are threatening aquatic life, including salmon eggs and parr, so we get involved in tree planting on river banks to provide shade. We have helped with a number of re-meandering schemes on the Dee and Don tributaries too. The latest is the [Easter Beltie Restoration](#) managed by the Dee Catchment Partnership. Salmon evolved in rivers that sprang from wooded hillsides. The fact banks are now often bare is a problem for the fish. There is a brilliant film called Riverwoods which is well worth a watch for more information on this subject. [www.scotlandbigpicture.com/riverwoods](http://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/riverwoods) It may surprise you to know that salmon are very much a woodland species.



**Stream of Gairn**

Twice a year we distribute free trees to schools and community groups across the country. We hope to give away our 15 millionth tree this year. Recent North-east recipients have included Mid Deeside Community Trust, Strichen Community Park, Camphill Wellbeing Trust, Murray Park Trust, Tarland Development Group, The Boyndie Trust, Bridge of Don Community Council, Grampian Housing Association, Friends of Brimmond and Elrick Hill, Blackburn and Kinellar Allotments, 1<sup>st</sup> Westhill Scouts, Blackdog Residents Association. So lots of wee trees scattered about the district but all doing their bit to fight the climate and nature crises. If you know of an organisation with a bit of ground to plant then you might point them at our scheme [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/)

Finally, our volunteer threat detectors are ever-vigilant for planning proposals which may threaten ancient woodland. They flag up cases to our national campaigners who send detailed letters of objection. Major casework in the North-east has included the A96 duelling. We take on this role as there is no statutory body standing up for ancient woods. NatureScot usually only intervenes where a designated site is at risk. We think all ancient woods are worth protecting as there are so few left.

I hope this quick canter through what the Woodland Trust is up to in your district has been useful.

**PR Officer George Anderson**



## Shark & Skate Citizen Science Scotland

The Flapper Skate; *Dipturus intermedius* is the largest of all European skates and rays. It is an elasmobranch, meaning that, like sharks, they have cartilaginous skeletons. They predate on benthic species including crustaceans, teleost fish and smaller elasmobranchs as well as some pelagic prey. Females are larger than the males and can reach up to 3m in total length and over 2m from wingtip to wingtip. They are classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species.

Historically this species was known as the 'common skate', but this was actually comprised of two different species, the flapper and the blue skate (*Dipturus flossada*). Both have been described as extinct in large parts of their range following a long period of exploitation by fisheries; this coupled with the fact that individuals take a relatively long time to reach maturity (estimated at over 10 years) and produce few offspring, means that populations will be slow to recover from negative impacts.

Flappers, like all skates, reproduce by laying egg cases (this is one of the main distinguishing features of skates as opposed to rays which give birth to live young). Recent observations indicate that females select small boulder covered habitats in relatively shallow waters to deposit their egg cases. After hatching these egg cases can sometimes be found washed up along the shoreline following big storms.

The presence of eggcases along the coast gives us an indication of the existence of mature female skate as well as how population numbers may be changing over time.



**Adult Flapper**



**Eggcase in Kelp**



**Eggcase in situ**

Through various social media platforms, Shark and Skate Citizen Science Scotland (SSCSS) are engaging with the general public and encouraging them to report findings of not only egg cases, but also sightings of adults and juveniles across Scotland in order to further the limited current scientific knowledge of population distribution and numbers, we are also sharing this data with the Shark Trust so that they can add it to their national database.

Although our focus is on flapper skate we are keen to hear from anyone who has an interest in or has had any encounters with or found eggcases of any shark or skate species around the Scottish coastline. You can find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sharkandskatecitizensciencescotland/> and on Instagram:

@sharkandskate.scot

**Lauren Smith EGCP**

## River Bed Life

I have spent a big part of my environmental career delving into the incredibly diverse ecosystem that occupies the beds of our rivers. Everyone is aware that river beds provide the habitat for fish eggs and juveniles but there is a lot more going on in there. There are often well over a hundred different species of invertebrates, which includes the young stages of a wide range of flying insects, adult molluscs, leeches and worms, to be found in an area encompassing a few square metres of the gravel, cobbles, sand and mud found there as well as all the myriad plants, algae, fungi, protozoa and bacteria. This a whole world in microcosm and a food web which reaches right up to fish, mammals and birds. If you stick a net onto a gravelly river bottom and kick around a little upstream of it a lot of the small invertebrate animals will drift into it. You can empty them into a white tray and be astounded at the life running around in it. This is exactly what I did for a living for quite a few years working for SEPA and its predecessors. Why would that be so important? Well it's because these tiny invertebrate animals tell us a lot about water quality and pollution. Some of them need very clean water, rich in oxygen, to survive, such as stonefly and mayfly larvae, others can take a moderate amount of pollution and yet others can survive almost anything you can throw at them such as midge larvae and certain leeches and worms. So as water quality deteriorates the population of invertebrates changes and this tells an ecologist like me a lot about what's going on. Even better, because of the effect of a pollution event on their life cycle, these invertebrates can tell us about the history of such events over the past several months whereas a chemical sample of the river water would only tell you what was there at the instant of sampling. These tiny animals can tell us about a wide range of different water quality problems including sewage, enrichment with fertilisers, farm manure, pesticides, soil runoff, droughts, floods, acid mine water and so on.

I was one of the first to bring these methods to the north east of Scotland and I, and eventually with other colleagues, spent some brilliant years investigating the water quality of our local rivers before anyone else. I helped develop some quite sophisticated ways of interpreting the information we were gathering and, later with European colleagues, standardised the methods across many other countries. But now I am really interested in helping citizen volunteers to learn how to do this for themselves. The information volunteers collect helps to spot pollution problems, as SEPA staff cannot be everywhere, and empowers local citizen groups with information so that action can be taken. It is necessary for volunteer information to be properly coordinated and checked but all this is now possible with schemes like RiverFly and SmartRivers (Google search on these). I am planning a trip to a local river this year to demonstrate the sheer numbers of invertebrates that live in our river beds. Look out for it!

**Roger Owen**



**Stonefly Nymph**



**Waterlouse**



## Tips for Photographing Flora

Capturing photos of flora and fungi (typically toadstools, plants, trees or even the something on a seashore) which isn't as a rule moving too much or at all is definitely easier than shots of wildlife that could be difficult to see and possibly fast moving. This however doesn't guarantee 'great' shots are certain but there are several things that can be done to improve average shots to create something much more appealing & perhaps even remarkable.

- Firstly think what it is about the subject that makes you want to take a shot of it. Is it the shape, colour, or something else? Once you've decided what attracts you to taking any shot think about how to isolate it to emphasise the subject to illustrate what's attractive about it.
- It's always best to wear old clothes and be prepared to 'get down & dirty' - meaning if photographing very small or low-lying subjects kneel or even lie down to get down as low as you can to capture it at ground level. Plants and many other subjects rarely look remarkable in pictures taken looking directly down on them.
- I always carry a pair of gardener's detachable knee pads in my backpack. They fasten with Velcro straps so can be fitted and removed very quickly.
- Assuming you've chosen the best angle to take your shot which also means the cleanest possible background it's time to consider the ideal camera setup to capture it.
- Although not always necessary some form of camera support is best to avoid camera shake. If you have one, use a tripod or bean bag to steady the camera. Alternatively use the ground or a wall along with a cable release or the camera's 2-second timer to release the shutter to avoid camera shake.
- Set your camera to Aperture priority and Auto ISO with selective Auto Focus points (AF) using either a single focus point or zone focus to concentrate focusing on your chosen subject. Aim for a shutter speed of at least 1/125 second or faster to eliminate potential movement to improve sharpness.
- To isolate and blur the background set a wide aperture (low f-number e.g. f2.8 - f5.6) but these apertures will require very accurate focussing. If a greater area of sharpness is wanted in front & behind the subject (this is called depth of field), set the aperture to a mid-higher number such as f8 - f16. The focus point is less critical with these narrower apertures but must still be over the primary subject.
- Take test shots to check the image is sharp where it should be and adjust the focus points and/or aperture setting to achieve the result wanted. If you intend post processing your images there are many tools to help draw viewer's eyes into or onto subjects but a really useful one is a vignette which darkens the corners (and is adjustable) to highlight the main subject. Try it!
- Finally always try to plan your shot to avoid distracting or messy backgrounds which could spoil an otherwise really great shot.







### Ranging for Nature Project

We are really excited to have secured funding for our Ranging for Nature project and we need your help to bring the project to life!

The Just Transition Participatory Budget Fund was allocated to each of Scotland's council areas to support community action on climate change and biodiversity loss. The local group's project was one of 46 projects put forward to Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action ([Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action \(avashire.org.uk\)](http://avashire.org.uk) which, in total, exceeded the available funding by 300% so there was a fair amount of competition! Thanks to our Aberdeenshire members, and other residents who voted for us, our project came second and we were duly allocated the £15,000 we asked for.

So what is the project about and how can you help? With the Ranging for Nature project we want to give communities in the Northeast the skills, knowledge and tools to protect and enhance the nature on your doorstep, to carry out conservation projects and to help wildlife in your local green spaces. We are going to:

- Help establish teams of community conservation volunteers.
- Equip our volunteers with the tools they need to carry out nature projects: sowing wildflowers, planting trees, restoring habitats and helping native wildlife to thrive.
- Teach nature conservation skills through events such as bio-blitzes.
- Open these opportunities to reach a wide and diverse group of people across the northeast.
- Establish a local, native tree and wildflower nursery to support planting projects at our reserves.
- Provide schools and community groups with skills and equipment, such as trail cameras, bat detectors and nesting box cameras, to monitor their own nature projects and enthuse young people.



Our grant from AVA has already enabled us to buy the tools and equipment we need to start the ball rolling on all these exciting activities. Now we are working hard on our plans to bring all this to life! The tree nursery is already well on the way with deer fencing erected at our site near Stonehaven and we are lucky to have the advice of a tree nursery expert too! Now we need volunteers to help us grow and manage the trees – **please let us know if you would like to sign up.** The more the merrier!

We are going to provide many opportunities this year for our members, and anyone else who is interested, to acquire skills in wildlife identification and conservation work and we already have a list of the things we need done on our local trust reserves thanks to our new seasonal ranger, Zachery Brown. **Please let us know if you'd like to help with these too!**

We will also be ready to loan to schools our wildlife monitoring equipment (trail cameras, bat detectors, moth traps and more) with help on their use for wildlife recording **so if you know of a school that would be keen to take us up on this offer let us know.**

**Roger Owen**

### **Tree nursery diary – Tree log #1**

Our Ranging for Nature project is starting to take shape. The committee has been working hard behind the scenes holding planning meetings and purchasing equipment. One of the first purchases was deer fencing for the tree nursery. Here are some before, during and after photos of the deer fencing being installed. The tree nursery is officially in place. Now we need trees!

Not so fast... First, we need to prepare the soil, gather local, native seed and nurture seedlings. There will be plenty of opportunities for volunteers to pitch in, so watch this space!

**Liz Chellingsworth**



Before



During



After

### **No hibernating on social media!**

Do you follow us on Facebook? If not, search for 'Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire Scottish Wildlife Trust Local Group' and see what we get up to when we go wild on social media.

While our wildlife may have been sleeping and resting up ahead of spring, there has been no hibernating on social media. Winter is a great time to get to know trees 'in the nude'. Our 'Tree of the month' series proved popular with wild and whacky facts about some of our favourite native trees. We also shone a spotlight on some tree characteristics such as bark and buds – perfect for those brushing up their tree identification skills.

Our 'Turning winter blues, green' attracted a lot of interest with posts on a wide range of topics all promoting wildlife to combat winter blues. In February, our followers had the chance to get up close and personal-ish to some of the committee members as they described their interests and what they get up to over winter to keep spirits high.

As Mother Nature yawns and stretches, we are preparing some more weird and wonderful facts and figures to share. In April and May we will be heading down to the riverside, looking out for spring wildlife and sharing seasonal arts and crafts for the whole family. As for June – 30 days wild will be back. If you have any wild activities to share, do get in touch. We love to hear about what our members do to connect to wildlife.

Not all our members are able to join in with hands on conservation activities so this spring and summer we will be highlighting some online opportunities to contribute to citizen science as well as wildlife monitoring that can be conducted from the comfort of your own home, garden or public parks and gardens.

As always, if you have any wildlife stories to share, please let us know!

**Liz Chellingsworth**



**A loveliness of Orange ladybirds (Rose Toney)**

### **Contacts for Members**

Dr Roger Owen (Chair)	Email for all committee members: committee@swtaberdeen.org.uk
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### **Walks for Spring and Summer 2023**

Outdoor meetings venues as noted - **Booking Essential**. To book on the walks please contact [bookings@swtaberdeen.org](mailto:bookings@swtaberdeen.org). To check details of the Talks please contact Kirsten Dickson [committee@swtaberdeen.org.uk](mailto:committee@swtaberdeen.org.uk). **Please check SWTAberdeen.org.uk or our Facebook page**







**(AberdeenandAberdeenshireScottishWildlifeTrust)** for latest information and if the Walks are going ahead.

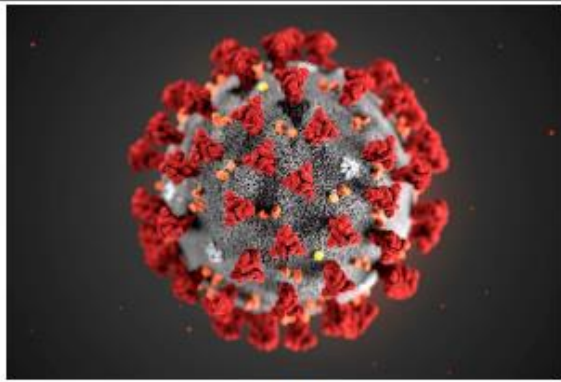
- May 18th** - Developing Young Nature Leaders Rachel Faichnie Scottish Wildlife Trust (online)
- June 17th** - Botanical Outing to Potarch David Elston
- July 20th** - Species on the Edge David Hill
- August/Sept (date TBC)** - Visit to the Beltie Restoration Project Dee Catchment Partnership
- September 9th** - National Scottish Wildlife Trust AGM and walk Aberdeen Maritime Museum

**Corvid Quiz**

Here’s a little quiz: can you identify your corvids? Against each named corvid enter the letter of the picture you think it is. Answers will be published on our website one week after you receive this newsletter.  
[swtaberdeen.org.uk](http://swtaberdeen.org.uk)

UK Corvid Identification Quiz

 <p>(a)</p>	 <p>(b)</p>
 <p>(c)</p>	 <p>(d)</p>



(e)



(f)



(g)

Carrion Crow

Chough

Covid-19



(h)

Hooded Crow

Jackdaw

Jay



(i)

Magpie

Raven

Rook