

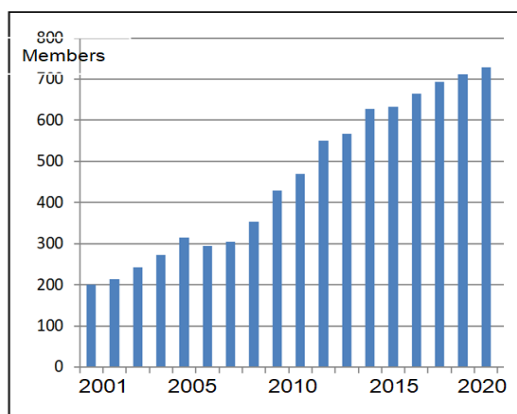


1. Membership



Since we resurrected the local Stirling and Clacks Group of the SWT our membership has grown from 200 in 2001 to 700 in 2020. The longest

memberships belong to Michael Usher (1965), Patrick Stirling Aird (1968), Joanna Thomas (1973) and David Thorogood (1976). Some of the original founding committee members of the local group are still active ... they include David Bryant, John Haddow, Harry Kerridge, Keith and Valerie Graham.



The current longest serving Committee Member is

Roger Gooch who is retiring at the 2020 AGM. Roger was involved during the 1980s in the designation of Alloa Inch as an SSSI and later helped look after it when it became an SWT Nature Reserve. In the photo he is repairing one of

the erosion points in the bank around the island. I am sure our members would like to join me in thanking him for all those years of service.

2. Winter Meetings and Covid 19

Our winter talks programme has been held in Stirling Indoor Bowling Club's social space. This venue has required greater involvement of the committee setting out chairs and making teas etc. and we are indebted to Jan Harbidge who has shouldered much of the burden. The Bowling Club has the advantage that we are not pressured to leave the room after the talks have finished giving attendees the chance to catch up with friends and talk to the speaker. As a result audience numbers have increased and we had a record attendance (72)



for the talk about the Scottish Raptor Group by Duncan Orr Ewing. It was held on a January night when there was a weather warning and in anticipation of a poor turn out we had apologised to the speaker! This winter we have had a great series of talks .. Jo Davis fascinated us with his discussion of how butterflies and moths navigate during their long migrations. James Hutchinson and Carolyn Hedley talked about improving the biodiversity of golf courses and it was encouraging to see local green-keepers in the audience. Richard Thompson spoke about Ancient Woodlands and in particular the conservation work associated with Scotland's Rare West Coast Rainforests. Liz Ferrell gave a fascinating talk about bats and Sandra Stewart a representative of the Forth Rivers Trust discussed their work on the River Allan.

Unfortunately our last talk and AGM had to be cancelled because of the Covid 19 lockdown. We are currently arranging to hold the delayed AGM on line using Zoom on Tuesday August 4th at 7.30pm. At this meeting I will retire as chairman. Guy Harewood has been nominated to take over with Chris Cathrin as a vice-chair. We also intend to run a series of online winter talks on the first Tuesday in the month.

3. Local Nature Conservation Sites

In the late 1970s the SWT started collecting information about habitats rich in wildlife which had been identified by local naturalists and had no statutory protection. By 1990 our local group had identified 282 'Wildlife Sites' in Central Region. SWT professionals developed a formal process of validating 'Wildlife Sites' involving mapping the sites and carrying out habitat and species surveys. Rigorous standardised criteria were then used to evaluate each site. In 1993 the Central Branch of the SWT set up a 'Wildlife Site' team of volunteers with the help of a 'Wildlife in the Community Project Officer' Davie Black. This involved the Branch in a huge amount of work including running training courses.

Many local authorities adopted what became called 'Local Nature Conservation Sites' (LNCS) in their planning processes with a presumption against their development. In a national survey carried out in 2003 Clacks recognised 26 LNCS sites, Falkirk 90 and Stirling 0. With the support of the RSPB we approached Cllr Jim Thompson and eventually LNCS were included in the 2014 Stirling Development Plan. More recently TWIC (The Wildlife Information Centre) obtained contracts from Stirling and Clacks Councils to take over the responsibility for LNCS and Sue Sexton and Gabi Rice-Grunert are our SWT representatives on the steering committee. LNCS are currently being resurveyed and Cocksburn Reservoir at the base of Dumyat in the photographs below is the latest to be designated.



Some of the reservoirs wildlife ... Ospreys, Chickweed Wintergreen and Green Hairstreaks

4. Sticky Catchfly

We are the guardians of the biggest surviving UK population of the beautiful pink flowered Sticky Catchfly which grows on Hillfoot cliff faces. For the last 3 years the plants have been desiccated during three consecutive droughts in April and May. We were concerned because the numbers of flower spikes on our Yellow Craigs monitoring site fell from a peak of 709 in 2015 to 90 in 2020. To try boost the population we



gathered seed and grew up 2 year old plants which we planted out on Yellow Craigs last autumn. Young plants were also planted in Alva Glen by the Heritage Trust and of the 69 that have become established 37 flowered this year. To produce a reliable supply of seed we have planted a bed of 'conservation plants' at Bridge of Allan allotments (photo). Deputy First Minister Keith Brown is shown holding our first batch of seedlings. He became an MSP 'Species Champion' for Sticky Catchfly because the major colonies are in his constituency. During a Scottish Parliament Environment Debate in 2019 he gave an account of our group's work.

5 Cambus Pools Nature Reserve

The resurfaced tracks, wider verges and improved access to the banks of the Rivers have made the reserve attractive to the public. During the Covid 19 shutdown even more visitors have arrived and one morning I counted 20 before 10 am. Amongst them have been several really good photographers who have provided us with an impressive library of pictures. Their photos show that for the second year running there have been two pairs of Water Rails with chicks. We have always been anxious lest too many visitors (and their dogs) would disturb the nesting birds but from what evidence we've got this doesn't seem to be the case. We have been joined by BTO bird ringers who ringed a Grasshopper Warbler, a Bullfinch, Wrens, Sedge Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Long-tailed Tits, Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Goldfinches, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Dunnocks, a Robin, Willow Warblers and a House Martin.



Photo Ian Bone

6. The work of the Planning Team

Our Group has a team of seven members organised by Liz Albert who look at all the Clacks and Stirling Local Authority Planning applications. If they consider there is potential for adverse impact on wildlife they advise the authorities. As you can imagine this involves a tremendous amount of work. Planning regulations are always being revised and this contributes to the team's homework. The revision of the National Planning Framework involved them attending a Scottish Government run public consultation event and a workshop session run by SWT HQ staff. Clacks is currently reviewing its Local Development Plan the scrutiny of which is extremely important. In addition the volume of forestry planning is increasing particularly in the Ochils (see photographs below). In this connection the team is pressing for greater recognition by Scottish Forestry of the species and habitats listed in the Scottish Government's Biodiversity List. I am sure you would want to join me in thanking them for their tireless efforts.



2014

Jerah on the Ochils the biggest area of new productive forestry planted in the UK during the last 25 yrs



2020

7. Verges and the Covid 19 Lockdown

During the Coronavirus lockdown local authority verges and amenity areas remained un-mowed allowing the many species of wild plants found in them to flower of the first time. For instance sheets of pink Ladies Smock or Cuckoo Flowers appeared ... it is the food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly. We have joined with other conservation organisations encouraging the councils to reassess their normal cutting regimes. There is another side to this issue where austerity campaigns have led to the abandonment of management and the replacement of grasslands with scrub. The A9 embankment at Lecropt used to have a wonderful show of orchids. In 2007 (when we helped manage it) there were 1900 but it has been allowed to get overgrown with bushes and as a result there were only 90 orchids in 2020. Our Group's surveys of the vegetation on the King's park, the Castle Rock and Gowan Hill have



highlighted similar issues with scrub growth replacing meadows in a number of sites. We would like to see the Local Authorities reprioritise the management of public land to take more account of their impact on biodiversity.

7 Facebook and Twitter sites.

Both our Facebook and Twitter sites have been doing well. If you don't already watch them just Google the three terms Stirling, SWT, Facebook to find the site .. you don't need to be a Facebook member to use it. Thanks to all those that contribute.

8. Replacing the Chairman

After 20 year in post I have decided that it was time to hand over the reins of running our local group to a new Chair who would bring youth, new ideas and different priorities. When Sue and I resurrected this Group in 2000 although some elements of wildlife conservation were planned at a national level most of the organisation was focused at a local level. We had Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs), Local Biodiversity Officers and Local Biodiversity Steering Committees. The latter were attended by not only voluntary organisations like SWT, RSPB, BSBI, Bug Life etc. but officers from the Councils, SNH, the Forestry Commission, FWAG etc. During my tenure I have watched this local focus slowly diminish as wildlife conservation is re-organising at what is considered a more effective 'landscape' level. Professional organisations often claiming lack of resources have withdrawn their local support. There is of course a debate to be had here but our Group has remained loyal to its 'local' SWT remit. We are still attempting to discharge our responsibilities to the original Stirling and Clacks local biodiversity action plans - indeed all the programmes outlined above were part of this. Retaining this role is a major commitment of people's time and effort and perhaps it is an appropriate for the new Chair and Committee to discuss whether it is effective.

Based on other SWT Groups' experience we had anticipated that finding a new Chair would be difficult and so we sent a letter appealing for volunteers and outlining why we thought the Group's activities were important. We were delighted by the response with a number of heavily committed candidates offering to be involved if it became essential. Luckily this was not the case and Guy Harewood and Chris Cathrine volunteered and both are excellent candidates. At subsequent committee meetings we agreed that if elected at the AGM Guy would take over as Chair initially with Chris as Vice Chair.



Guy at Cambus Pools

Guy has worked closely with our Group for many years having been Biodiversity Officer with Clacks Council and then subsequently Biodiversity Officer and Sustainability Officer with Stirling District Council. We have collaborated with him in many ways, for instance the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans, Local Authority Planning Matters, the revision of Local Authority Development Plans, the mapping and validation of Local Nature Conservation Sites and Control of Giant Hogweed.

Chris is Director of Caledonian Conservation with 5 employees based on the Carse of Lecropt. His company provides a wide range of ecological services including ID courses and training in Ecological Impact Assessment. He has given talks on both spiders and reptiles



Chris catching spiders with a Bug-Vac

and amphibians to our group as well as running primary school pond dipping courses at Doune Ponds. He is a trustee of the UK Amphibian and Reptile Groups.

10. The 2019-2020 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.

Chairman, Cambus Pools Reserve Convenor
Treasurer, Committee Meetings Chairperson, Planning Team
Group Secretary
Minutes Secretary
Meetings Venue Organiser
Moth Group Organiser
IT Advisor and Mammal Group Convenor
Facebook Organiser
Committee member
Committee member, Planning Team
Committee member, Planning Team

Roy Sexton
Liz Albert
Ally Lemon
Jack Robinson
Jan Harbidge
Tony Rogers
Gabi Rice-Grunert
Melissa Shaw
Michael Christie
Roger Gooch
Tom Palmer

Roy Sexton March 2019.

Contact: RoyGravedigger@aol.com

Our most popular Facebook Post so far in 2020 was on the 17th Feb celebrating the first Celandine in flower and the use of the plant's tubers to treat piles. In a similar post Jenny Marsden was the first to hear a cuckoo on 17th of April at Drymen. The issue which drew most interest was the spread of non-native Sitka spruce seed from forestry plantations across the Scottish countryside
<https://www.facebook.com/SWT-Stirling-Clackmannanshire-Local-Group-883465691739783/>



Lesser Celandine was originally called Pilewort because its tubers were thought to resemble 'piles'. According to the 'Doctrine of the Signatures' this was a clue as to their potential medical properties. Culpeper's Complete Herbal (1653) states 'This herb is good for the piles, to ease their pain and swelling and stop their bleeding'