

Stirling and Clackmannanshire SWT Group's Annual Newsletter

April 2017 - April 2018

1. Membership

The local membership has dropped slightly from 738 in 2017 to 708 households (1292 members) in 2018.

2. Winter Meetings and Outings

Our winter talks programme has been held in a new venue at Stirling Indoor Bowling Club. This move seems to have been satisfactory and attendances have held up in the range 30-50. The move has required greater involvement of the committee setting out chairs and projection equipment and making teas etc. and we are indebted to Jan Harbidge who has shouldered much of this burden.

Our talks included: 'Wild Life Conservation in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park', 'The Potential Impact of Brexit on Environmental Legislation', 'RSPB's Plans for the Forth Estuary', 'The Future of the Scottish Wildcat' and 'The Birds of Clackmannan'. We introduced two new initiatives both of which were successful. We invited the wildlife artist Darren Woodhead to show us how he so successfully captures images of wildlife in the field under the most adverse conditions. Secondly we dedicated a meeting to reviewing our Group's conservation efforts at our Cambus Pools Reserve. Committee members discussed how the populations of birds, mammals, moths and plants have changed over the last 30 years (see reserve report below).



Watching Water Rails at Cambus Pools

Our major outdoor event was an Open Day at Cambus Pools. We put out moth traps and mammal traps overnight and then invited the local residents and SWT members to discover what we had caught on camera. Fortunately it was a beautiful day and we had about 60 visitors. We also ran outings both to the new 'Jerah' conifer plantation on the Ochils above Menstrie and to see the Sticky Catchfly colony on Yellow Craigs above Logie Kirk.

3. Conservation and Wildlife Monitoring

- **Wildflower Monitoring:** Over the last 20 years the Group has carried out annual wild flower counts at 40 sites and 50 people have been involved. The plants monitored include Early Purple Orchid, Toothwort, Frog Orchid, Lesser and Greater Butterfly Orchid, Broad Leaved Helleborine, Globe Flower, Petty Whin, Sticky Catchfly, Early Marsh Orchid, Birds Nest Orchid, Bog Orchid etc.. When the counts give cause for concern we have endeavoured to do something about it. A talk describing how simple actions (eg. just talking to the landowner) can often have major beneficial effects has become quite popular and provoked much discussion. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland carries a description of a talk given at their AGM on their website file:///C:/Users/sexton/Downloads/7-Roy-Sexton-BSBI%20(2).pdf



Barry Boswell

Rare Bearded tits have been recorded at our Cambus Pools and Tullibody Inch reserves

- **Frog Orchids:** In 1985 the wild flower rich meadows at Balgair Muir (near Kippen) were planted with Sitka conifer forest. Running through the area was a cornstone quarry which contained about 80 rare Frog Orchids. The quarry was left unplanted but became surrounded by mature forest. In 2007 the orchid numbers had dwindled to 10, largely as a result of being overgrown by coarse grasses. Since then with the cooperation of the land owners we have strimmed and raked the site each year and have eventually got the numbers back to 70. This orchid was thought to be extinct at the two other local sites but a single remaining plant was found in 2017 at Dumbrock Muir near Milngavie.



Open day at Cambus Pools - opening the moth traps

- **Giant Hogweed:** Over the last three years SWT unpaid volunteers have helped the Forth Fisheries Trust in their attempt to systematically eradicate Giant Hogweed from the banks of the Allan, one of the worst affected rivers in Scotland. Using 'Roundup' spray it is estimated that over 40,000 plants have been killed between Dunblane and Cornton. Unfortunately SNH has withdrawn funding of these programmes except in Northern Scotland and although Forth Fisheries will continue running the project this year they probably will not be able to do so in 2019. If the spraying is stopped dormant seeds in the soil will grow up and produce tens of thousands of seeds per plant which will quickly undo all the good work done by years of spraying. The Chairman has been meeting with Local MPs and Councillors in an attempt both to keep the programme running and to persuade Network Rail and Scottish Water to treat major colonies on their land.
- **Mammal Recording:** In the last year our Group obtained a grant from the People's Postcode Lottery to buy equipment that we could use to monitor small mammals. We now have 5 cameras that are triggered by animal movement which have been used to record the mammal population at our Cambus Pools Reserve (see results below).
- **Moth Recording.:** Our moth group organised by Tony Rogers has had a most successful year. Their major project was to carry out a monthly moth trap at our Cambus Pools reserve. There were nine participants who recorded 36 micro-moths and 119 macromoths over the course of the year. We are currently organising the construction of extra trapping equipment to survey more sites.

4. Protecting the Wildlife Interests Associated with Local Authority and Forestry Planning.

During the last four years we have lost much of the professional infrastructure that used to safeguard wildlife interests during the planning process. For instance neither Clacks nor Stirling have Biodiversity Officers and SNH restricts its comments to sites with statutory designations like SSSIs.



Small mammal trapping - weighing a bank vole

This has put a lot of pressure on voluntary groups like SWT, RSPB, the Woodland Trust and Buglife who are left looking after the majority of the countryside. To this end we have developed a network of extremely helpful naturalists who share their valuable information and advice.

- **Local Authority Planning:** We have two separate teams that look at all Clacks and Stirling planning applications. Currently the Clacks team has been dealing with a retrospective application to dump rubble in Brandyhill Wood. This was turned down by the Council yet the owners have continued to exploit the site. Despite our Group's protests to Clacks Council no action has been taken. We are concerned that the failure of LAs to enforce planning regulations might be widespread and we are consulting SWT HQ staff about the issue. In the Stirling area we were dispirited when the Scottish Government gave permission for a major development at Park of Keir on green belt land between Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. This was against the wishes of the Council and the Government Reporter. Our Group had been fighting a series of applications on this site since 1989 and eventually the developers have won. However on a more positive note we did see the withdrawal of plans both for a holiday chalet development in a policy woodland at Gargunnoch and for houses on a wildflower meadow in Kippen.



Protecting a Petty Whin plant (known to have been on this site for over a century) at the side of a footpath upgrade

- **Upgrading Footpaths.** The edges of footpaths provide an increasingly rare short grassland habitat for a number of protected plants. We have been liaising with planners where improving access to the countryside has involved replacing narrow muddy paths with 2m wide gravelled tracks which often threaten the verges. For example on Callander Crag there are 7 species of orchids on the sides of such a 50m stretch of footpath and at Cocksburn Reservoir the upgraded path went beside the last remaining local colony of Petty Whin. In these cases we have enjoyed helpful cooperation from both access officers and the construction teams involved. .



Norman Still

Tour organised by the Forestry Planning Group of the new Jerah forestry plantation on the Ochils behind Menstrie. This site is the biggest new plantation in the UK for the last 25 years.

- **Vetting forestry planning applications** The Scottish Government's policy to increase the area of forestry in Stirling and Clacks from 17 to 23% of the land area has created a lot of work for Liz Albert and her forestry planning team. They have developed good relationships with the two main Forestry Commission Scotland Woodland Officers who deal with our Group's area. As a result it has been easier to get feedback on case outcomes. They also have a good working relationship with the RSPB staff member who deals with forestry and woodlands in Western Stirlingshire, where many of these planning proposals are located. We are still concerned at the lack of impact of our responses and although the system has improved in the last few years it is still limited and inflexible.
- **Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS)** are local habitats rich in wildlife which have been identified by local naturalists. Unlike SSSIs they have no statutory protection but have been through a robust survey and designation process. So far our local authorities have agreed to recognise these sites in the planning processes, with a presumption against development. TWIC (The Wildlife Information Centre) based in Midlothian has 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.

• 5. Our Cambus Pools Reserve

During the period from 2010-15 the verges, meadows and ponds at our Cambus Pools reserve became badly overwhelmed by scrub, coarse grasses and reeds. Over the last two years the reserve manager Rory Sandison and our group have made strenuous efforts to put things right. The reeds in the west pond were cut twice with an amphibious reed cutter which has opened up the water surface. The track verge sides have been strimmed and raked by volunteers to increase wild flowers and the east meadow has been grazed by the SWT's 'Flying Herd'. During the year we recorded 160 plant species on the reserve and were able to compare it with similar lists from 1993 (104) and 2008 (132). This improvement in the 'Floral Biodiversity' included 4 new orchid species. During November 2017 a mixed flock of about 400 Redwings and Fieldfares arrived tempted by the huge numbers of hawthorn berries on the bushes we planted in 2003. We were also delighted to discover that the BTO had seen bearded tits in the reed beds and we also saw a water rail with two young. Our summer mammal survey revealed an unusual diversity of 21 species. These included common and grey seals, harbour porpoises, dolphins, otters, foxes, moles, hedgehogs, stoats, weasels, grey squirrels, rabbits, hares, roe deer, wood mice, bank voles, field voles, water shrews as well as Daubentons, pipistrelle and long eared bats. Monthly moth surveys by Tony Rogers and his team recorded 155 species together with 7 species of butterfly.

• 6. Web Site <http://www.swtstirling.org.uk/>

The Group Web Site run by Melissa Shaw, Gabi Rice-Grunert and Jan Harbidge has kept the membership informed of our meetings etc. Postings on our Facebook page have been made at 2-3 day intervals by Liz Albert, Jonathan Livingstone and the chairman. The take up or 'hits' are sometimes surprisingly large and the publicity from the site brings welcome visitors to our meetings and extra volunteers.

7. The Committee

Thanks are due for the enormous amount of work done by the committee as well as the many other members who have helped during the year: We would particularly single out Helen McLaren who is retiring after keeping our Meetings Minutes for the last 3 years. The rest of the committee has offered to carry on for another year and as a result of our appeals we have had several new volunteers.

Chairman, Cambus Pools Reserve Convenor
 Vice Chairman, Alloa Inch Reserve Convenor
 Treasurer and Committee Meetings Chairperson, Planning Scrutineer
 Membership Secretary, Meetings Venue Organiser
 Moth Group Organiser
 IT Advisor and Mammal Group Convenor
 General Secretary, LNCS Organiser
 Minutes Secretary
 Facebook Organiser

Roy Sexton
 Roger Gooch
 Liz Albert
 Jan Harbidge
 Tony Rogers
 Gabi Rice-Grunert
 Sue Sexton
 Helen McLaren
 Melissa Shaw

Roy Sexton March 2018.

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Reed cutting at Cambus Pools