

Stirling and Clackmannanshire SWT Group's Annual Newsletter

.. Our 40th Year! .. April 2016 - April 2017

1. Membership

The local membership has increased from 690 households in 2016 to 738 a year later..

2. Winter Meetings and Outings

We have had good attendances at nearly all of the winter talks. There has usually been between 30 and 50 present. Topics included, Photographing the Wildlife of Clacks., Salmon in Local Rivers, Local Moths, Puffins and Guillemots, Malta and Migratory Birds, Wildlife in New Lanark during the 1790s and Local Orchids. Analysis of the 'sign in' sheets for the last two years showed that 145 different people came to our meetings with 25 stalwarts who attended more than half the talks. In February with only 3 weeks warning Stirling Council cut our time at the Raploch Community Centre by an hour which sadly made this excellent venue impracticable. After a lot of searching Jan Harbidge has found a very good replacement venue at the Stirling Indoor Bowling Club in Riverside. It has a big events room with lots of parking.

We also found that we could not run most of our summer excursions because of SWT's requirement that somebody should be present with a current first aid qualification. However 8 people have subsequently obtained the certificate. Two visits to foster more understanding of the Forestry Industry have been arranged to a timber mill and a chipboard factory.



From the talk on puffins by Michael Christie

3. Conservation and Wildlife Monitoring

- We were flattered to be asked by BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland) to give a talk at their AGM about the wildlife monitoring activities of our group. A resume was published in BRISC's magazine. Subsequently we have had a similar invitation from BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland). The Group has carried out wild flower counts at 40 sites and 50 people have been involved. The plants monitored include Early Purple Orchid, Toothwort, Frog Orchid, Lesser Butterfly Orchid, Broad Leaved Helleborine, Globe Flower, Sticky Catchfly, Early Marsh Orchid, Birds Nest Orchid, etc..
- For 13 years we have been monitoring a wonderful area of wildflower meadows along the sides of the Braeleny road in the hills east of Callander. The site has 8 sorts of orchid as well as many other attractive species. Our recent counts showed a sharp decline in Greater Butterfly Orchid which seemed to be associated with a change in grazing regime which was introduced as part of an initiative to encourage Black Grouse. Together with BSBI we have been involved in discussions with the land managers of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park but unfortunately without effect. In 2016 John Snodin spotted an unfamiliar orchid on this site. It was identified as a Small White Orchid the first record in West Perthshire.
- In 2013 a survey conducted by Stirling University Nature Society revealed that there were about 4000 flowering spikes of Sticky Catchfly on the cliffs and crags beneath Dumyat and Craig Leith. In 2002 this beautiful Red Data Book plant was found at 20 UK locations, two of which were in Wales and the rest in Scotland. Roy Sexton contacted the BSBI recorders for each of these sites and found that there had been no records at ten of them during the last



Small White Orchid a newly discovered species in our area

decade, making The Hillfoots' population by far the most important in the UK. To try and raise the profile of the plant and help prevent its extinction the Group asked the local MSP Keith Brown to become its 'Species Champion' which he was delighted to do. There are now 74 members of the Scottish Parliament who are championing various species; Bruce Crawford the Stirling MSP has adopted the slow worm.

- During the last two years SWT volunteers have helped the Forth Fisheries Trust in their attempt to systematically eradicate Invasive Non-



Melissa Shaw hands over the sticky catchfly facts sheet to Keith Brown MSP

Native Species from the Allan, one of the worst affected rivers in Scotland. Giant Hogweed was selected as the prime target because of the horrible blisters its sap produces. Teams have been spraying the banks with glyphosate or Roundup from Braco down-stream to the River Forth. Between Dunblane and Cornton it is estimated that 42,000 plants have been killed and there are another 2,000 yet to be treated. Unfortunately there is a significant seed bank in the soil so spraying will have to be repeated for some years as new plants establish.

- In 2012 the local moth recorder John Knowler gave our group a talk and encouraged us to get a Robinson trap and help gather information from some of the unrecorded areas around Stirling. Tony Rogers, the committee member who looks after the trap, reported that it was out on 48 nights last year and 174 species were recorded. The best overnight catch was 425 moths in the garden of his house in Kings Park.
- As a result of our Winter Talks programme we have become aware that terrestrial mammal recording in our area is weak and uncoordinated. Committee member Gabi Rice-Grunert undertook to try and raise the profile of the topic. She organised an evening meeting of both those already active and potential volunteers; 22 attended. This was followed up by a field training day run by Graham Wilson and attended by 10. We have recently applied for a grant to fund traps so that we can start field surveying.
- Melissa Shaw and Roy Sexton made a 'Citizen Science' study of the pollination of the Broad Leaved Helleborine which grows on our Cambus Pools reserve. As predicted by Charles Darwin this orchid attracted wasps as pollinators however what he did not anticipate was that the visitors were virtually all females. This observation is consistent with the finding that the Helleborine produces the same scent as cabbages being attacked by caterpillars. The female wasps attracted by the volatiles emitted by such plants carry away the small caterpillars to feed their young. The orchids trick the female wasps by producing the same smell.



Spraying Giant Hogweed

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 any more and SNH restricts its comments to sites with statutory designations like SSSIs . This has put a lot of pressure on voluntary groups like ourselves, RSPB, the Woodland Trust and Buglife. However, we have made significant progress in developing a network of extremely helpful naturalists who share their valuable information and advice with us. This is very pleasing.

- **Local Authority Planning:** We have two separate teams that look at all Clacks and Stirling planning applications. The Clacks team has recently been strengthened by Jonathan Livingstone, and by Gabi Rice-Grunert who specialises in applications in the Ochils. The Stirling team has very recently been joined by Wendy Scott. Throughout the year, we comment on at least one or two applications each week, often more. The results of major applications to which we have objected are: The retrospective application to dump rubble in Brandyhill Wood (Sauchie) was turned down; The Holme Hill (Dunblane) development appeal was rejected; the application to recommence quarrying at Murrayshall Quarry (Cambusbarron) was rejected. The Park of Keir greenbelt appeal is still awaiting a decision by the Scottish Government. The Clacks team are currently investigating an application for an extension to the existing Burnfoot Hill Windfarm (Tillicoultry), which appears to be on the footprint of land set aside as mitigation for the first phase of project!



Moth trapping at Cambus Pools

- **Forestry planning applications** play an increasingly important part of the Planning Team's workload as the industry strives to meet the Scottish Government afforestation targets. We have made site visits and commented on applications at Carim near Greenloaning, at the Linns near Dunblane, at Ballochleam near Kippen, at Ballindalloch Moor near Fintry and at the Garden Estate Buchlyvie. We discovered during the year that the Jerah forest north of Menstrie (which we commented on last year) is the biggest new forest created in the UK during the last 25 years.
- **Liz Albert who has specialised in the Forestry Planning Process** was asked to address SWT's Planning Workshop in early February 2017. The procedures involved are different to those used in Local Authority Planning. While communication with Forestry Commission staff has improved significantly, we have been troubled by the poor quality IT of the FCS public registers, by undemocratic decision-making, by lack of routine feedback, and by limited monitoring of compliance. The timescales for responding are tight and sometimes hard to meet. Currently the planning procedures are under review and we hope the SWT will be able to influence the findings.
- **The designation of Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS)** has been a priority for our group. These are sites rich in wildlife which have no statutory protection but which have been through a robust survey and designation process. They are recognised in the local authority planning process 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 but the steering committee overseeing this transfer is concerned that this process seems to have stalled.

5. Our Local Reserves

- During the last year there has been a huge amount of work on our Cambus Pools reserve funded by Inner Forth Landscape Initiative IFLI/LIFE EcoCo. The muddy track from Cambus village was resurfaced and the trees on the side of the track trimmed so it is now much easier to access. Thanks have been received from wheel chair users. The reeds that covered the western pool were cut back by an amphibious cutter and there is now open water. The meadows were also cut with a soft track flail cutter. To try and encourage the growth of wild flowers the verges which had been over-run by coarse grasses have all been strimmed by volunteers and seeded with wildflower species. These included Dyers Green Weed, Mullein, Ox-eye Daisy, Devils Bit Scabious and Yellow Rattle. The orchid population continues to increase and seeds of Broadleaved Helleborine have been collected from Cambus to introduce the orchid into a site in Fife.

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

Gabi Rice-Grunert has put a lot of time and effort into the Group Web Site and Melissa Shaw has set up and managed a group Facebook page.

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:

Chairman, Cambus Pools Reserve Convenor
Vice Chairman, Alloa Inch Reserve Convenor
Treasurer and Committee Meetings Chairperson, Planning Scrutineer
Membership Secretary
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 2017.

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Reed cutting at Cambus Pools