

# Fife and Kinross Group



## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 100 Summer 2017



### Message from Alison Irvine, Chair



I'd like to start my note with some good news from my point of view – there seems to have been a mini-population explosion of hedgehogs in my area. I have three coming to be fed every night (peanuts, mealworms and soaked cat biscuits and of

course water). Within half a mile I know of three other neighbours with visiting hedgehogs at the same time as mine are in my garden so they must be different ones. At the time of writing in May the weather has been very dry and the hedgehogs will be struggling to find invertebrates so competition for the food dish is fierce and there is much snorting and grunting. Now I know where the “hog” part of the name comes from.

Now the reason this is good news is that there has been a huge national decline in hedgehog numbers and indeed for many years I have not been aware of many hedgehogs in my area. Hedgehogs are a species that can do very well in gardens and personally I am more than happy to leave untidy corners in the garden for wildlife to enjoy.

At the joint SWT/ Friends of the ST. Andrews Botanic Gardens talk on bumblebees in February this year, one of the many fascinating things we learned from Helen Dickinson, our speaker from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, was of the spread northwards of

the Tree Bumblebee. Unlike the other species we are used to in Fife and Kinross, this species nests in holes in trees, often high above the ground, and it will often use bird or bat boxes. Coming back to my garden, I have bumblebees crawling into a hole high at the top of the garden shed door. I've not tracked down where they are going yet, but I suspect that they may be these “tree bumblebees”. So again my garden is a source of interest and enjoyment. This is a theme I have mentioned before – not all of us are able to visit SWT reserves or other “special” places in the countryside, but there is great conservation value in the gardens and parks of our urban and sub-urban areas. So please make a little time for yourself to enjoy the small but important nature havens close to where you live.

I must just briefly mention the very interesting bat evening held jointly with the Ecology Centre in Kinghorn in April. It was a perfect bat evening, warm and still, and after an introductory talk from Richard Smith, we were able to go out round the edge of the Loch and have wonderful views of bats hunting over the water silhouetted against the evening sky! I hope that you will take the opportunity to join us at some of the talks and events organised by your local Group – they are always interesting and enjoyable and you will be made very welcome.

Finally I am delighted to report that Robertson, who have generously sponsored FAWN for some time now have agreed to extend and increase their support. We are extremely grateful to the company and we have invited them to submit an article outlining their commitment to wildlife and the environment which is reproduced overleaf.

### 100th Edition of FAWN!

The eagle-eyed amongst our readers will have noticed that this edition of FAWN is number 100. Number 1 was produced in May 1975 and was a duplicated typewritten publication on foolscap paper (remember that format?!). That issue contained a Chairman's column, various news snippets, appeals for volunteers and notices of forthcoming events. Since then FAWN has evolved in terms of format but the basic ethos remains the same: to inform our members of activities; to provide interesting and stimulating information about local wildlife and to generally act as a means of communication between the Centre Committee and our members.

I am privileged to have followed in the footsteps of many editors over the last 42 years and, looking back over previous issues, I notice a recurring theme. My predecessors have periodically appealed to members for feedback and I would like to echo their calls. I hope that you find FAWN an interesting read but I would be delighted to hear suggestions for things you would like to see included. What about letters to the editor; your favourite wildlife photos? Do get in touch and let me know.

Ian Hunter (Editor Nos 83-100) [mish@st-and.ac.uk](mailto:mish@st-and.ac.uk)



**Robertson is delighted to sponsor the Scottish Wildlife Trust.**

As an infrastructure, support services and construction company we realise how important the protection of biodiversity sites is and continually monitor and update our Environmental Policy to reflect this. Our on-site monitoring ensures that we will never knowingly damage or disrupt areas of natural interest.

## **Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future: an important goal for the Robertson Group.**

As an infrastructure firm, we have a duty to respect, preserve and promote our natural environment and the abundance of ecosystems and species that call Scotland home. Our passion and commitment to protecting our natural environment led us to complete three projects in partnership with the Forestry Commission Scotland – The Queen's View visitor centre refurbishment in Perthshire, Cuningar Loop Woodland Park in Rutherglen and The Lodge Visitor Centre in Aberfoyle. Three projects with one similar goal – transform the existing site to complement and elevate the surrounding environment.

Steeped in history, The Queen's View – an idyllic viewpoint overlooking Loch Tummel, with views stretching to the prominent peak of Schiehallion in the distance – was named after Queen Isabella, the first wife of Robert the Bruce. Surrounded by a network of woodland walks, the Queen's View is the area's most popular visitor attraction. A prominent vista, it was important that we approach the refurbishment of the centre with the respect and sensitivity the surroundings so command. Nestled in the leafy Tay Forest Park, the area is alive with life, ranging from buzzards and capercaillie to foxes and the rather elusive pine marten. Located on the site of an old farmstead, the visitor centre is housed within the old forester's cottage and barn. Home to existing bat colonies, the buildings are of particular importance in the summer season, although bats can roost here year-round. To help conserve the protected species, we used bat access slates to help create a larger habitat for the animals, and ensured that their roosts were not disturbed. With bat numbers on the decline, it's our duty to provide managed protection for British bat species. The Queen's View was not our first restoration project with the Forestry Commission, having already refurbished The Lodge Visitor Centre in the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park in the Trossachs. A flagship visitor attraction, the overarching mission was to attract more visitors to the park. Our work included the construction of a new path to an impressive waterfall nearby, as well as erecting a new wildlife hide to allow both visitors and resident wildlife to enjoy a peaceful coexistence.

Our work continued with the Forestry Commission when we were appointed contractors of the regeneration of a derelict area within Glasgow's East End. Part of the 2014 Commonwealth Games Legacy, the Cuningar Loop project, managed by the Forestry Commission, has seen 15 hectares of neglected land transformed into attractive community green spaces and accessible city woodlands. Originally occupied in the 1800s by fresh water reservoirs that formed part of the city's water scheme, the suspension of the scheme and resulting abandonment of the area over time attracted illegal mining and landfill sites, before becoming a dump for the city. As the site lay abandoned, wildlife flourished, with bullfinch, orange tip butterfly, otters and roe deer spotted amongst the weeds in what had become a rather incongruous nature reserve. Preserving this wildlife was critical in the development of the site, with ecological clerks appointed to oversee all aspects. This was a major civil engineering project and due to the sensitivity of the site, we sought advice from a number of informed resources including SEPA and the Clyde Fishermen's Association.

Chemical and biological constraints required a soil science approach to create a safe site for the public and local wildlife. We worked closely with SEPA to make sure that the correct soil mix was used, in order to allow wildlife to thrive. The soil and compost went through a "riddling" process, which introduces air, improving the quality. We scheduled ongoing consultations with the Clyde Fishermen's Association during the project, given the close proximity to the river, constantly monitoring works to ensure marine wildlife was not affected. Today, the once ravaged peninsula has received a breath of life thanks to the addition of trails, picnic benches and children's play areas.

The desire to have a positive environmental impact is embedded in our core, influencing the way in which we approach and plan each project. It is of immense importance to us that the work we do brings lasting value to the communities we serve.

## The Importance of Bumblebees

By Helen Dickinson, Surveys & GIS Officer,

**Bumblebee Conservation Trust**

In the UK we have 25 bumblebee species, with just 8 being commonly seen. (For a useful guide to identification go to: [https://bumblebeeconservation.org/images/uploads/Beewalk/ID\\_sheet.pdf](https://bumblebeeconservation.org/images/uploads/Beewalk/ID_sheet.pdf))



Our bumblebees are in trouble due to loss of habitat and impacts of parasites, diseases and use of pesticides, in our gardens as well as in agriculture. Bumblebees are important pollinators of fruit, vegetables and flowers, without them and our other pollinating insects, our landscapes and eating choices would be very different.

The bumblebee life cycle starts in spring with queen bumblebees emerging from hibernation, they need to quickly build their energy reserves by feeding on spring flowers, before choosing a nesting site. Bumblebees nest in a variety of places, underground in old rodent burrows, or above ground in tussocky grass, at the base of hedgerows and in gaps under sheds. A few of our species nest higher off the ground including in compost heaps, bird boxes and the eaves in houses

(don't worry, they don't cause any structural damage).

The queen lays all the eggs in a bumblebee nest, with her workers (all female) maintaining the nest and collecting pollen and nectar to feed the developing bumblebees.

Towards the end of the summer the queen lays eggs which will develop into new queens and males, these are the next generation of bumblebees. New queens and males leave the nest to find a mate. Once mated the new queens will locate a hibernation spot and settle in for the winter. Meanwhile the rest of the colony, the old queen, her workers and males, start to die off as the summer draws to a close, their job is done!



Bumblebees rely solely on flowers for their nutritional needs from spring to autumn, so with the loss of wildflower meadows and wild habitats across the UK, they need our help more than ever. You can provide food for bumblebees throughout the year, from crocus and pussy willow in the spring, to foxgloves, alliums and cosmos over the summer. There is a huge choice of flowers that you can plant, whatever your space, from a window box full of nasturtiums to a whole bed of sweet peas, snapdragons, cornflowers ... see [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org) for more ideas.

You can also get involved in surveying for bumblebees. We run the National Monitoring Scheme for bumblebees, a citizen science scheme, which aims to collect enough data on bumblebees across the UK to identify population trends, which species are increasing and which are decreasing. This will act as an early warning system so we can direct our conservation work where it's most needed. Volunteers choose a route of around a mile, which they walk once a month between March and October, recording all the bumblebees they see. This data is then submitted to us so we can analyse the results at the end of each year. You can find out more about getting involved by heading to [www.beewalk.org.uk](http://www.beewalk.org.uk) or emailing [beewalk@bumblebeeconservation.org](mailto:beewalk@bumblebeeconservation.org).

You can find out more about how to help bumblebees and the work of Bumblebee Conservation Trust by visiting our website [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)

# EVENTS

## SUMMER/AUTUMN 2017

Any suggestions? Able to lead a walk? Give a talk? Get in touch with Paul Blackburn on 01382 542826



All welcome. We advise sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for outdoor events.

### **Sat 1 July 1.30pm Outing: Plants & butterflies**

A short walk and climb along the coastal path to the spectacular setting of Kinraig Head.

Meet at the car park at the entrance to Shell Bay NO 469 005

### **Sat 12 August 2pm Outing: Dragonflies and peatland plants**

Portmoak Moss is a raised bog near Loch Leven and was covered in a conifer plantation until 2005.

Meet at the parking area on the access track off the B920 just south of Scotlandwell at NO 183 015.

### **Wed 18 October 7.30 pm Joint Talk with Pitcairn Society: "Fife Pilgrims Way",**

Speaker to be confirmed.

Collydean Community Centre, Glenrothes KY7 6UL

### **Sat 21 October 10am Outing: Lochore Meadows**

A walk with local expert Richard Smith to explore the South Side of the loch, the Nature Reserve and Harran Hill if time.

Meet at the main Lochore Meadows Car Park.

### **Thu 9 November 7.30pm AGM and talk**

Speaker to be confirmed

Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd, Cupar KY15 5HE

For more information on all outings contact

Paul Blackburn on 01382 542826

### **MOTHING EVENTS LED BY TIM BRAIN**

#### **Fri 16th June - Bankhead Moss.**

Meet in car park at 9.30 pm.

#### **Fri 14th July - Cullaloe.**

Meet in car park at 9.30 pm.

#### **Fri 21st July - Fleecefaulds Meadow.**

Meet at reserve car park at 9.00 p.m.

#### **Fri 18th August . Dumbarrie Links.**

Meet at the shore car park at 9.00 pm.

#### **Fri 13th October. Cullaloe**

Meet at the car park at 7.00 pm.

**N.B. For ALL mothing events: (i) it is essential that you contact Tim on 01577 840317 to confirm times and that the event is going ahead; (ii) ensure suitable footwear and bring a torch.**

### **Events Updates and Latest News**

Be sure to regularly check our web site:

(<http://www.swt-fife.org.uk/>)

and Facebook pages

(<https://www.facebook.com/swtfifeandkinrossmc>)

for news and important changes and updates to the programme plus FAWN in colour!



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[www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk)

