

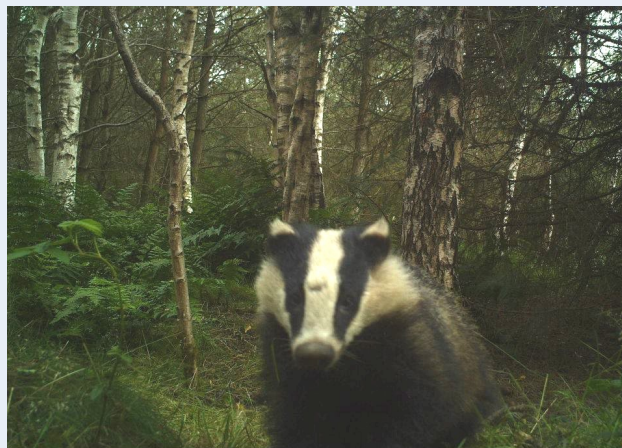


#### Message from Alison Irvine, Chair



The first thing I must do with this note is to update you about the hedgehogs. For those of you who read this column, you may remember that last time

I was getting excited about having 3 hedgehogs coming to the garden for food. However, not a week after the deadline for my musings in FAWN, disaster! I was wakened at 2.30am by screaming outside the window and on investigating, something large ran away and the screaming thing turned out to be a hedgehog. In the morning it was clear that a badger had ripped its way into the garden through a wooden garden door which was rotten at the bottom. Although this hedgehog survived the middle of the night attack, I have not seen any of them again, nor any signs of them at all. Over the course of the next couple of weeks 4 neighbours reported losing their hedgehogs – two of them found inside-out hedgehog skins in the garden and one found a trail of bloody badger footprints across her patio in the blood of the hedgehog victim. In all, if you include my 3, in an area of about ½ mile radius at least 6 hedgehogs were killed by badgers. So what is going on? Badgers are the only animal which can readily kill and skin a hedgehog. At the time of these attacks there had been no rain for several weeks and the ground was very dry. The badgers would have been feeding young and struggling to find worms and other invertebrates. My theory is that they turned to hedgehogs in desperation to get food.



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This could be one of the unexpected consequences of drought, and appropriate for me to discuss in terms of the DRY project currently being undertaken in the Eden catchment and on which I represent SWT on the steering group. I know we have had a very wet summer, but potentially drought is far more serious for our wildlife and habitats. The DRY project is looking to get information, stories and folk lore about drought, what the consequences of a long dry spell might be and how we have coped with drought in the past. I have mentioned this before, but worth saying again, – our SWT membership in Fife and Kinross has a huge bank of local knowledge and I would be very pleased to hear from any of you who have stories or information about drought which you would like to share.

I hope to see many of you at our AGM in Cupar in November. We will be particularly pleased to welcome Jo Pike from SWT head office who will talk about the SWT vision for action over the next 5 years and we will relate this back to what we are doing in our own area as volunteers.

## Recent Outings: July 2016 to August 2017

The rock pool guddle on the East Sands, St Andrews in July led by Alison Irvine was an interesting new experience for me. We tested the suction power of the tentacles of sea-anemones on our fingers; these were very graceful when in the water but reduced to jelly-like blobs out of the water. The rock pools near the sea were full of hermit crabs and tiny brine shrimps. On the rocks what looked like armoured wood-louse were chitons, 8-segmented molluscs with the more attractive alternative name of coat-of-mail shells.

The publicity for the September Tayport heath and coast walk advertised the possibility of both osprey and dolphin. We found osprey immediately, perched on posts out in the Bay. Dolphin took longer to spot, but eventually we spotted one leaping out in front of the bows of the Pole Star as it headed out to sea. The patches of wild annuals, established by the "Fife Buzzing" project were alive with the sound of insects buzzing. The usual mix of waders were feeding on the mud and through telescopes we saw the moulting flock of goosander on Lucky Scalp. Butterflies on the heath, where both *Calluna* and bell heather were in flower, included red admiral and peacocks.

Richard Smith guided us around Valleyfield Woods at the start of October in search of fungi. We found over 30 species of fungi, I rather like the attempt to give them English names to make them more accessible. These included blackening brittlegill (*Russula nigricans*) and the delicate porcelain fungus (*Oudemansiella mucida*) under beech and oakbug milkcap (*Lactarius quietus*) under elm. Fungi of dead wood included candlesnuff and turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*). The appropriately named herald of winter (*Hygrophorus hypothjus*) reflected the season as did the large numbers of pink-footed geese calling overhead. We also learnt something of the history of the woods which were landscaped by Humphrey Repton in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Hard frosts and blue skies greeted us for the November outing to the Tay waterfront at Newburgh. There were lots of teal and a few goldeneye on the Tay. The cold drove almost everyone away before the spectacular sight of a murmuration of starlings performing acrobatics over the reedbeds on Mugdrum Island before dropping into their roost.

Our final outing of the year was to St Andrews. Large rafts of sea-duck were offshore and through the telescopes we identified common scoter, velvet scoter, great crested grebes, long tailed ducks and red-throated diver. We didn't find any purple sandpipers on the Castle Rocks but there was a lone ringed plover and a flock of turnstone turning over the seaweed.

The first outing of 2017 was to Findatie, Loch Leven where winter and spring overlapped as we had sightings of fieldfare and redwings in the birch woods and heard the first chiffchaff of

the year in song.

Highlights of the summer 2017 outings included the July outing to Kincaig Head for butterflies and plants and the August visit to Portmoak Moss in search of dragonflies. The windy weather at Kincaig meant that we only saw one butterfly, a common blue, but the spectacular display of flowers provided some compensation.



Looking towards Kincaig Head

The Portmoak outing, led by Danielle Muir from the British Dragonfly Society also resulted in few sightings. However, Danielle and the local surveyors gave an excellent overview of the challenges when making conservation decisions. Work to rewet the bog in 2014 to encourage the growth of sphagnum moss and to prevent drying out of the bog has resulted in large, and hopefully temporary, declines in the dragonfly population. We did see a male common hawk, and a female laying eggs and Danielle managed to find the larvae of a large red damselfly. Again the presence of other wildlife, including green woodpecker and spotted flycatcher provided some compensation.



Danielle fishing for larvae!

Many thanks to Alison Irvine, Richard Smith and Danielle Muir for leading outings. If you have any ideas for future outings do let me know.

(This report was compiled by Paul Blackburn to whom we are also grateful for leading three of these outings – Ed.)



## Good News for Deaf Birders?

By Ian Hunter

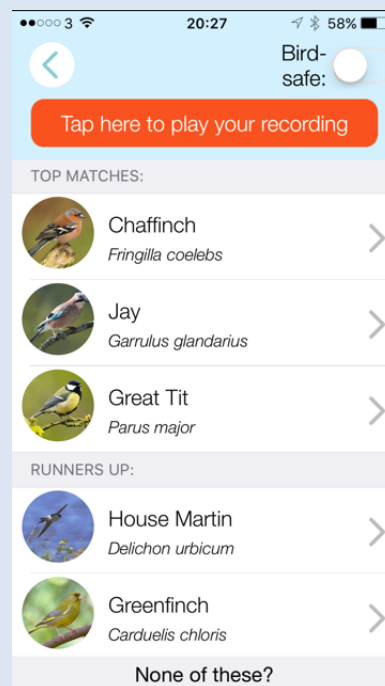
Any keen bird watcher with a hearing loss will be aware of the frustration which comes from being unable to detect or positively identify a bird from its song or call, either because it is not loud enough or because the frequency is too high. For some similar species like warblers, a definitive identification is only possible if one can hear the song.

Imagine my delight when I learned of an app for smartphones which was being hailed as Shazam for bird-song! (For those unfamiliar with Shazam it is an amazingly accurate app which will “listen” to a short snatch of music and identify the title, artist and composer. It will even direct the user to a web site where the same music can be purchased!).

Currently there are three apps available for identifying birds from their calls and songs: **BirdsongID**; **ChirpOMatic** and **Warblr**. Their basic features are summarized in the table below.

BirdsongID	ChirpOMatic	Warblr
IOS & Android	IOS only	IOS & Android
£3.99	£3.99	£4.99
36 species	80+ species	220 species
No internet connection rqd	No internet connection rqd	Internet connection rqd

The principles and basic operation of all three are similar: 1. The user records the song or call, using the phone’s microphone, for a fixed period of time dictated by the app; 2. The app then analyses the sound and suggests a list of likely suspects in order, each given a percentage score as to the probability of a correct match. Below you can see a sample result obtained using ChirpOMatic.



Each app has its strengths and weaknesses. The major drawback of Warblr is its requirement, for analysis in the field, to be connected to the internet either wirelessly or via 3G/4G although recordings can be saved and processed later when a connection is available. BirdsongID has the most additional features including a facility to identify a song from data input manually on pitch, regularity, melodiousness etc.

As September is not an ideal time of year for birdsong, I carried out a preliminary comparison of all three apps using recorded songs of five common birds: Chaffinch; Blue Tit; Dunnock; Goldfinch & Willow Warbler. BirdsongID came out top, identifying the correct bird as the most likely candidate in 4/5 cases. ChirpOMatic got 3/5 and Warblr 2/5. In all cases but one the correct bird was in the top 5 choices even if not number 1. Admittedly this was just a very superficial test and I intend to carry out further observations in the field at a more suitable time of year.

Overall then, disappointingly, these apps are not a complete panacea for birders with hearing problems. To be fair, the developers of all three apps do not claim 100% accuracy but nevertheless they provide a useful tool to aid identification. I should be interested to hear from any readers who have used any of these products.

## EVENTS

### AUTUMN/WINTER 2017/18

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.

#### **Thu 9 November 7.30pm AGM and Talk: Cupar**

The AGM will be followed by a talk from Jo Pike (Scottish Wildlife Trust Director of Public Affairs) on the Trust's vision for the future, together with presentations from the Fife and Kinross Group on how we are contributing to this.

Meet Cupar Age Concern Hall 7.30 pm

#### **Sat 2 December 10 am Outing: St Andrews - Sea Ducks and Waders**

Take a break from Christmas Shopping in St Andrews to get a close up view of the offshore sea-duck and the waders on the rocky coast. Bring binoculars but telescopes will be available. Feel free to drop by for a quick view.

Meet Bruce Embankment Car Park (near the Golf Museum) 10am

#### **Tue 12 December 7.30 pm Talk: St Andrews - Swift Conservation in Tayside - Danielle Muir**

St Andrews Town Hall Supper Room 7.30 pm  
(£2 donation invited to cover costs)

#### **Sat 3 Feb 10 am Outing: Tentsmuir Beach Walk**

10.00-13.00 (short option) or 10.00-16.00 (longer option)  
**Morning** : offshore sea duck and the sandy seashore at Kinshaldy.

**Afternoon**: wader roost and seals near the ice house (bring packed lunch).

Meet Kinshaldy Car Park, Tentsmuir Forest, 10 am

(Note there is a £2 charge to access the barrier to the car park)

#### **Tue 6 Feb 7.30 pm Talk: Forestry Commission Conservation Work in Fife and Tayside - Gareth Mason**

Lecture Theatre B, Department of Chemistry, University of St Andrews, North Haugh 7.30 pm

#### **Sat 3 March 2 pm Outing: Parkland & Specimen Trees: Dunnikier Park, Kirkcaldy**

Meet at car park at bottom of access road to the hotel and golf course ((NT277983)

#### **Thu 29 March 7.30 pm Talk: Mark Caunt Wildlife Photographer** (Joint with Kinross Camera Club)

Probable venue: Thistle Hotel, Milnathort but phone or check facebook and web site for confirmation.

### **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!



#### **Do we have your email address?**

If you would like to be kept informed about all of our events by email then let Paul Blackburn know your address so that he can add you to our circulation list.

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