



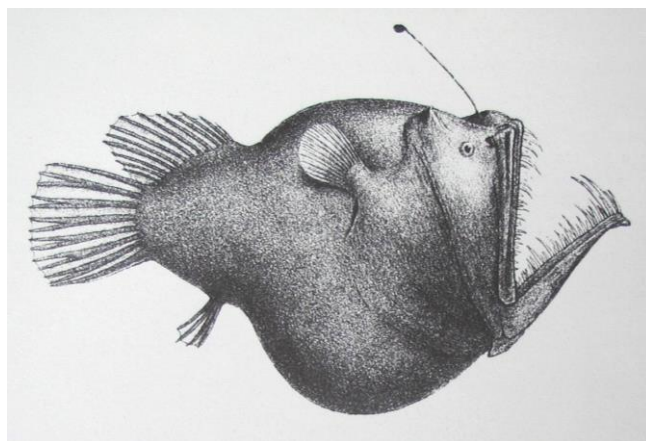
1. Membership

The local membership has dropped slightly from 708 households in 2018 to 684 households in 2019

2. Winter Meetings

Our winter talks programme has been held in Stirling Indoor Bowling Club. This venue 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.

Three of our talks by Hannah Riley, Lucy Webster and Ben Darvill all described the amazing progress being achieved in wildlife investigations with the use of modern DNA sequencing and satellite tracking technologies. Another common theme was marine research. Roy Sexton gave a stand-in talk about Sir John Murray perhaps Britain's greatest marine biologist who lived in Bridge of Allan. He became the chief scientist of the 1873-6 Challenger Expedition which discovered 4,500 new species during its 63,000 mile journey investigating the world's ocean depths. Our SWT Chairperson Linda Rosborough spoke about progress being made in Marine Conservation round Scotland's coasts. She also took the opportunity to present SWT's Juniper Award to our retiring secretary Sue Sexton.



Melanocetus murrayi one of many species ranging in size from microscopic plankton to giant sunfish discovered by Sir John Murray of Bridge of Allan

3. Our Cambus Pools Nature Reserve

During the last few years a lot of hard work has transformed our Cambus Pools reserve. Reeds have been cleared, the tracks have been resurfaced, the verges strimmed and the fences replaced. Our counts show that the number of plant species has increased from 104 in 1993 to 160 in 2018. We recorded 500 orchids in 2017 where there were none in 1993. One striking feature of our surveys is just how much wildlife activity occurs at night. The baited cameras that are triggered by small mammals on average recorded 60 visits per camera per night including mice, voles, shrews, foxes, hedgehogs, and weasels. In the summer when we walked round the reserve with bat detectors there was activity above our heads most of the time. Tony Roger's Moth Group with their light traps recorded 79 species during just one of their 10 monthly visits, the maximum number caught in one night being 365. During the March survey we found the reserves tracks covered in frogs and toads ... 72 in a 100m stretch ... there was lots of frog's spawn in the ditches next morning. In addition to all this we have seen otters, two harbour porpoises, and seals during the night at the mouth of the Devon.



A fox one of nearly 500 visitors to 2 baited camera traps during an 8 day period.

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. It had become extinct in Alva Glen and so we have grown up two year old plants for reintroductions. The seed was gathered from our survey site on Yellow Craigs above Logie Kirkyard. Alva Glen Heritage Trust led by Glyn Edwards and Sandra Cashmore climbed up and planted out 40 plants on the slopes at the top end of the glen and hopefully some should flower during the first week of June.



Alva Glen Heritage Trust planting Sticky Catchfly

5. Local Authority Planning

Our Group has a team of seven members 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 planning authorities. They have also helped write the advisory notes concerning bat disturbance used in planning regulations. Sue Sexton who is retiring after 19 years of overseeing this activity will be a hard act to follow.

6. Clearing Sitka Spruce

Sitka spruce is the main commercial forestry conifer. Unfortunately once it has reached cone bearing age it seeds into adjacent land. The beautiful area of heathland round the Gathering Stone on Sheriffmuir was becoming overgrown by conifers. A group of 21 volunteers from SWT and Butterfly Conservation cut down about 1,000 seedlings helping restore the area for the 19 species of butterflies found there.



The Gathering Stone Heathland

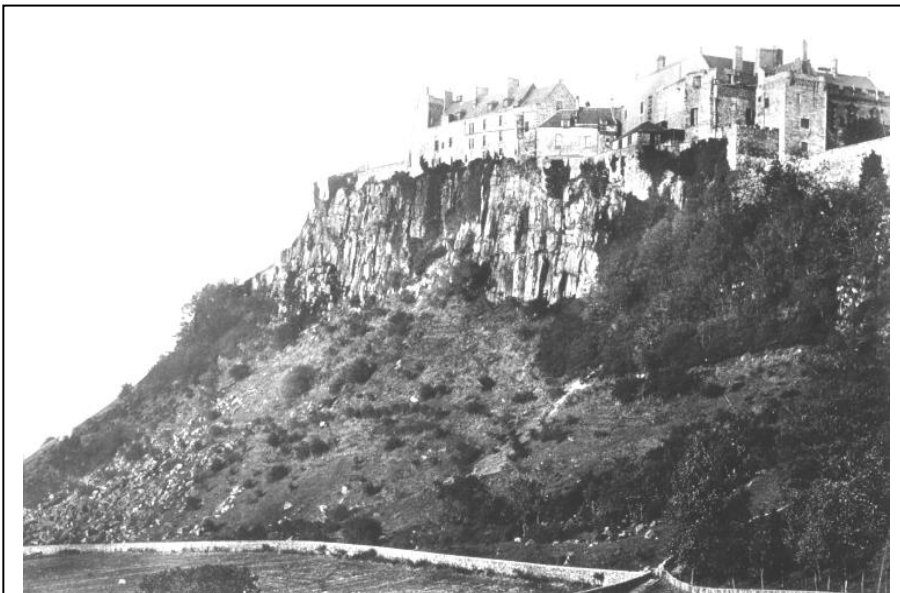
7. Forestry Planning

The Scottish Government's policy of increasing the area of forestry in Stirling and Clacks from 17 to 25% of the land area is already having a noticeable impact on the landscape particularly in the Ochils North of Menstrie. The 1,300,000 trees in the UK's biggest new forestry plantation at Jerah are becoming more obvious as the seedlings establish and get taller. There are also other schemes in the pipeline which if they are all approved will form an almost continuous belt of conifers across the Ochils from Menstrie to Greenloaning. Our Planning Team continues to monitor and respond to both Forestry Commission Scotland's Forestry Grant Scheme Applications and Felling Licences. As always our aim is to conserve valuable habitats and protected species across both Stirling and Clackmannanshire. To help us respond we not only depend on national wildlife data bases but more importantly the local experience and expertise of both Team members, and a web of helpful and generous local naturalists. We also collaborate with other local wildlife organisations like the Woodland Trust, the RSPB, SOC,

BTO, BSBI, Butterfly Conservation, Bug Life etc. It remains a hard job to make a significant impact on FCS decision-making, but we hope that things will change when FCS becomes 'Scottish Forestry' on 1 April 2019 and all decision-making will be fully devolved to the Scottish Government. Next week representatives of our SWT Group together with Friends of the Ochils have arranged a meeting with Cameron Maxwell, Scottish Forestry's Conservator for Perth and Argyll. We will discuss our misgivings about the Forestry planning process and top of our agenda will be the need to evaluate the cumulative impact of large adjacent applications ... not required at present.

8. Wildlife Surveys

A glance at this 1870 photograph of Stirling Castle Rock reveals how the slopes which were once kept free of trees for strategic reasons have become covered in woodland. In 1930 the local naturalists could see this change coming and recorded the flora for future reference. Over the last ten years we have carried out follow up surveys on the Castle Rock from which a mixed picture emerges. Rather surprisingly of 43 rare plants listed in 1831 29 still remain. These include the golden wallflowers growing on the castle walls and the hundreds of blue aquilegias in the woods near the Mote Hill. The losses include deadly nightshade which was dug up in 1880 when a young boy was poisoned after eating its delicious looking berries. Another poisonous plant Henbane has been lost as the bare slopes became overgrown. Its seeds were used in medieval anaesthetics and were found during excavations of the Toll Booth where it was thought to have been used to subdue prisoners. It is hard to believe that Rosebay Willowherb was not listed in 1930 since its sheets of purple flowers now cover half of Gowan Hill. Not all changes have been for the worse. The negative effect on the flora of the atmospheric pollution associated with industrial and domestic coal burning which was a worry in 1930 is thankfully a thing of the past .



Stirling Castle in 1870 the slopes kept clear of trees by the garrison

7. Moth Trapping

In 2011 the local moth recorder John Knowler addressed one of our meetings and pointed out how badly Stirling and Clackmannanshire moths were recorded. He encouraged our Group to do something about it and one of our Committee members Tony Rogers took on the challenge. Helped by a grant from SWT to buy a generator and light trap we have established a team of enthusiasts. Such equipment is quite expensive and heavy to move across country. To try and encourage more recruits Tony has experimented designing lighter and cheaper DIY traps based on rechargeable battery powered UV LEDs which are ideal for beginners. If you would like to get involved please contact us.



8. Local Nature Conservation Sites

Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) are 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) 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. So far 11 LNCS sites in Clacks have been through the survey and validation process and just require signing off by Council officials and similarly 8 have been through the process in Stirling.

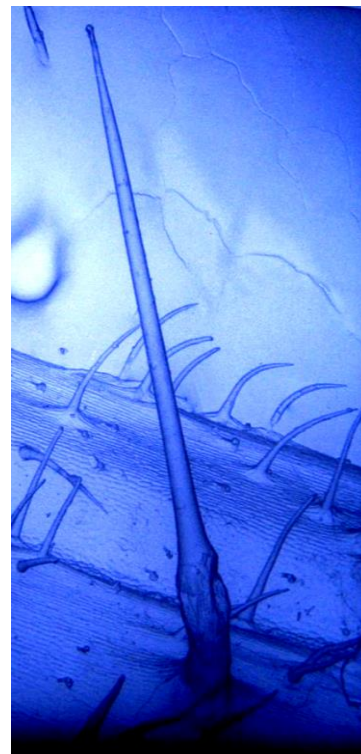
9. Web Site <http://www.swtstirling.org.uk/>

The Group Web Site run by Gabi Rice-Grunert and Jan Harbidge has kept the membership informed of our meetings etc. Postings on our Facebook and Twitter pages have been made at 2-3 day intervals by Liz Albert, Michael Christie and the Chairman. The take up is sometimes surprisingly large, like 'How Nettles Sting' for instance

10. The 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. Of particular significance is the retirement of Sue Sexton who has acted as General Secretary since the Group was reformed in 2000.

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



How nettles sting

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

