



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

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Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future

Dundee and Angus Wildlife News

DAWN - Newsletter of the North Angus and Angus & Dundee Groups

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Introduction

After a successful season of excursions and lectures in the year past, as described in the report on the 'Wildcats' talk on this page, we look forward to the Wildlife Year to come in Angus.

Already we've had a most successful winter excursion to Lunan Bay to look for birds both on the land and at sea and a short exploration of the beach, which was followed by a tasty soup-and-sandwich lunch in the nearby diner. Look for the short report about this on the next page. We hope that as the weather improves we'll see more of you at our events planned for this summer and autumn. Wouldn't it be great if we have a really good summer for breeding birds and especially butterflies?

We'd also appreciate help from anyone who'd like to join in for one or more of our fund-raising events, clean-up sessions and other hands-on activities. Please speak to anyone on the committee or check with our website.

Volunteers for the Local Group Committee

We still badly need new members of the committee, to help with SWT activities in Angus and Dundee. Are you concerned with local wild animals and plants or their habitats anywhere in Angus? Want something done about them or it? Why do you think it's right that 'someone else' should do something about the problem without doing anything yourself?

Why don't **YOU** do something about it? **PLEASE** volunteer to join us on the committee. There's always lots going on and you find out at the basic level how wildlife conservation actually happens here in Angus.

Wildcats

Thursday 17th November 2016

An audience of over 50 members and visitors almost packed out the Upper Reid Hall in Forfar and formed one of the successful lectures of the past few years. Hebe Carus enthralled the audience with a fascinating account of the current investigations on and the state of the Scottish wildcat population. She told us about the careful studies, often using a series of 'Trail Cam' camera traps, in five separate study areas throughout Scotland which revealed a population estimated to be around 400 of these most secretive and elusive animals.



The work had been co-ordinated through a new organisation, Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA). The cameras are triggered by a built-in movement detector and operate

both in daylight and, with an infra-red light source, at night. Obviously, this 24-hour functioning is important in recording our hidden native cats, which are most active at dawn and dusk, with some activity at night. The camera traps were baited to attract these shy cats in front of them but also brought in a variety of scavengers, including badgers, feral cats, foxes and even pine martens, which sometimes took the attractive morsels themselves. Hebe mentioned that on one occasion in a western study area a most surprising visitor, a raccoon, was captured by one of the cameras! The most commonly recorded animals picked up by the camera traps, though, were roe deer along with a range of other forms of wildlife.

She herself was closely involved in the camera trap studies in northern Angus, particularly in the upper areas of Glens which form part of the Cairngorms National Park. The mixture of conifer plantations, moorlands and patches of birch scrub there provide good cover and reasonable habitat which favour these secretive animals. We were treated to a few of the camera trap videos showing true wildcats in action and also one or two other animals. They were fascinating to watch.

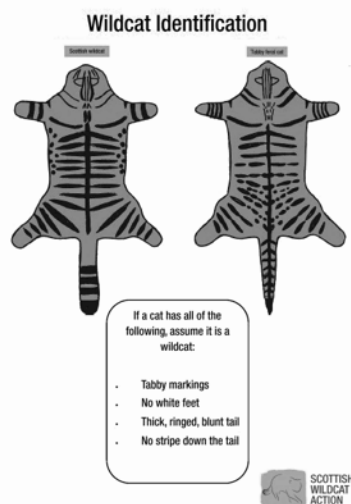
Winter Excursion

Saturday 7th January 2017

One considerable problem is identifying true wildcats from domestic cats and hybrids between the two just from images of the animals. Specialists affiliated to the SWA based at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh have carried out a series of studies of the main features of true wildcats. They have identified a number of features, such as the pattern of patches, stripes and spots on the coats of the cats, not just the well-known broad tail with a dark tip, that are characteristic of a true wildcat. The audience then was challenged with several photos and asked to tell if these were wild or domestic cats; an interesting puzzle.

As well as threats to our native wildcats such as habitat loss and changes, perhaps the most serious menace is the presence of feral cats, domestic cats gone wild. The problem is that although our domestic cats are related to Scottish wildcats, genetically close enough so that both can interbreed freely, they ultimately are derived from the desert wild cats of the Middle East. By interbreeding with true wildcats, they dilute the genes of our native cats which are very well adapted to the natural conditions of the country. A further problem is that feral cats can pass on a range of nasty diseases to wildcats. The final phase of the project therefore is to live-trap, vaccinate, neuter and release (TNVR) as many feral cats as possible. This TNVR work has only just started and will need to continue on for at least a few years in the future. It is hoped that this work will help to conserve and even restore some of the populations of our very own 'Highland tiger'.

A lively question and answer session followed, with many questions on their behaviour and distribution from the most interested audience. Several of our audience with long experience themselves of wildlife in the glens, including encounters with our native cats, were able to pass on their knowledge to Hebe. We hope that the information will be of use to the survey. It certainly was a most interesting and informative evening.



On a chill winter morning, the low but bright sun was very welcome in Lunan Bay, particularly since it seemed that the rest of lowland Angus was buried in dense mist or low cloud. About 30 of us, both local members and visitors from Aberdeenshire, met up in the main car park in Lunan Bay and then were ferried by three cars to the very limited parking space near the Angus and Dundee Bird Club hide on the south of the iconic ruins of Redcastle. We all spent time in and around the hide, taking advantage of the telescopes available to obtain good clear views of the waders along the beach, a few clockwork-like sanderlings, one or two curlews, several godwits, numbers of oystercatchers and crowds of gulls, and birds out on the water.

Far out were rafts of sea-ducks including the inevitable eiders but also numbers of scoters which appeared as small black bobbing shapes. It was rather difficult to see them at times against the strong sun. A number of the group also focussed their binoculars and turned the telescopes around to inspect the fulmars which were gliding around the



ruins of the castle, whose sandstone shone a distinct red on the headland above. They were already forming pairs on the battlements, in preparation for the breeding season.

Most of the party went on to inspect the sheltered inner chamber of the nearby wartime pillbox for overwintering adult butterflies. There weren't very many there, perhaps due to the poor summer the previous year, but four peacocks and several small tortoise-shells were there along with several moths. One or two small spiders could be seen as well and it is hoped that they won't affect the butterflies.

A number of the group then walked along the sands, picking up a variety of interesting items such as striped Venus and banded wedge shells. A few had neat holes drilled into them by a predatory snail to get at the animal inside. We were also looking or rather trying to hear if the locally-famous 'squeaking sands' were still in existence. Perhaps because of the conditions we couldn't get any responses.

The whole party responded very well, though, to the choice of two soups and several types of sandwiches for lunch at the Lunan Diner. Barbara and Liz had organised the meal at a very convenient site for a walk at the bay; as shown by other walkers coming in for a snack as well. It was an excellent day, perhaps even improved by finding out that the mist had persisted all day elsewhere along the coast.

Morrison's Bag-pack

Wednesday 22nd December

Barbara Thompson, the organiser, was unable to come but the rest of the group of volunteers, all wearing their SWT-logo fleeces, buckled down and had a most busy day. The store management were most helpful, providing storage facilities for our coats and other items and allowing the two SWT banners to be set up. It is an excellent time of year for large numbers of shopper with large loads needing to be packed and many were very grateful. Liz and Alban Houghton were among the first there and were soon busy behind the tills. Liz had to leave us after a short while for another engagement but returned later. Margaret and Peter Bainbridge soon joined in and a short time later Tom and Mary Harwood arrived. Ian Baird and James Ivory joined Jim to complete the set. Not all the customers wanted help with packing but the group were able to demonstrate that we knew what we were doing and could be relied on not to pack heavy items on top of soft easily damaged foods, either in the bags themselves or in the large trollies that nearly all needed. Even those that didn't need or want help were generous enough to contribute at least something to the collection buckets. A few of the volunteers had to leave early but most stayed for the whole six-hour period, for which we are most thankful. Peter, our treasurer, however was busy for the evening afterwards counting up the totals of piles of coins.

Our grateful thanks go out to the numbers of very generous shoppers who contributed a total of £705.94 to our funds (a figure somewhat smaller than that collected last year) and to the management of Morrisons who allowed us to arrange the packing session and collect inside the store. Many thanks to all concerned.

Street Collections

Although the street collections were moderately successful this past year, we've decided that because of continuing problems in finding sufficient volunteers and collections totals which are continuing to decline, to cut the number of these events. Only once or twice in the early days have we been able to gather a sufficient number of street-collecting volunteers to adequately cover such a large and crowded city centre as Dundee. In contrast, small numbers of volunteers are sufficient for the smaller towns and many people are more than generous but the numbers of passers-by often are relatively small. Another change that is affecting the potential for street collections is that increasing numbers of people seem to be relying on plastic and not carrying money at all. We wonder if the effort needed over several weekends would not be better spent on other activities. The committee have been looking to see if

we can turn to other methods of fund raising as well as increasing the profile of the Trust with the general public.

We gratefully thank all our volunteers of the previous years, as well as the large numbers of the good people of Angus and Dundee who've generously contributed to our finances.

News from the Reserves

Balgavies Loch: It's been a good autumn and early winter with large numbers of geese and ducks visiting the loch, although the freezing-cold spells of weather have frozen some areas of the surface. Last autumn a short preliminary survey of the invertebrates of the meadow on the south side of the loch took place and the results are now with us. They've revealed an interesting selection of approximately 70 species, enough to confirm that further investigations would be useful. The reserve subcommittee have decided to run a full survey this year so that you may see both professional and volunteer surveyors active on the meadow at intervals during the summer. The bad news, that you may have seen in the local paper, is that vandals broke one of the hide windows and were using an airgun to fire at the bird feeders. We're grateful that the Honorary Warden promptly and efficiently repaired the damage.

Lintrathen Loch: This loch also attracted large numbers of waterfowl as usual, although birders have been very pleased to pick out an American widgeon tucked in among crowds of our native birds. There have been reports of a green-winged teal on the loch as well. We hope to improve the foot bridge on the way to the new hide sometime in the spring, in an effort to make it easily accessible to wheelchairs.

The Miley: Small birds are much easier to see in the trees at this time of year and several people have been along to look. You may have seen the reports in a local paper of the dumping of large amounts of litter and wastes along the reserve and the costs of removing it. These reports have been greatly exaggerated and we're pleased to report that there have been no recent large-scale incidents, although the usual quantities of plastic litter and bottles continue to be dropped. The weekly clear-up sessions seem to cope with these.

Montrose Basin: Large numbers of wintering birds have gathered in the Basin, as usual. An official estimate of the numbers of geese this year was 71,000 birds, a very creditable number, although unofficially one evening a grand total of some 90,000 was estimated. The increasing totals seem to confirm the success of conservation efforts over the years in helping to increase the numbers of these iconic birds. By the time you read this the refurbishment and improvement of the Centre should have been

completed and hope that its closure for a few weeks hasn't affected you too much.

Seaton Cliffs: Late autumn and winter are a quiet time of the year for wildlife, although the weather can be lively enough (!), but there's always something going on. Autumn and early winter are good times of year to take a walk along the beach looking for shells and also peering into rock pools for breeding seaweeds (even if only a rather specialised interest). The fulmars are pairing up already and other seabirds beginning to show interest. Several litter picks have helped to clear some of the plastic, bottles and other items embedded in the dead vegetation.

Dundee Group News

The weekly litter-picking sessions along The Miley by a series of volunteers continue on as before. There have been no specific activities on the reserve since the successful and very useful leaf-clearing session in November but Tom helped to clear the drain to allow the water to clear away from near the Harefield Road bridge. The group are planning several events this year, starting with the Plant Sale in May, which will be held as usual in the Duntrune Garden centre in Dawson Park of Broughty Ferry.

Dates for your Diary

Thursday 16th March	Conserving Our Shores. Talk by Scottish Marine Conservation officer at 7:30 in the Upper Reid Hall, Castle St. Forfar. Admission £3.50 adults, accompanying children free.
Thursday 27th April	Sea Eagles on the East Coast by Owen Selly, from the RSPB introduction team. Following AGM at 7:30pm in the Upper Reid Hall, Castle St. Forfar
Saturday 29th April	Montrose Coffee Morning 10am-12 Old & St. Andrews Church Hall, High St. Montrose (<i>not 6th May as previously stated</i>)
Sunday 14th May	Visit to Tay Reed Beds Meet at 2pm at the Cross, Errol Village (NO251226) to turn left down Gas Brae. Bring binoculars.
Saturday 20th May	Dundee Plant Sale 10:30am-3pm at the demonstration Gardens, Dawson Park, Caenlochan Rd.
Sunday 4th June (tbc)	Barry Buddon Open Day <i>Please check date on website or press.</i> Guided walks for birds, insects and flowers. Meet at 10am Monifeth Playing Fields (NO 502323). Bring binoculars and lunch.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre Events

Full details of events can be found on scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk or www.montrosebasin.org.uk on the Visitor Centre page.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre will open daily from 1st March to 31st October from 10:30am to 5pm.

Dundee Conservation Volunteers

Contact John Whyman on (01382) 431848 (daytime), or 07940 165997 (mobile) for details of the current programme. A Sunday activity occurs once a month. The SWT minibus leaves Seagate Bus Station at 9:30am to the activity destination. Wear old clothes and stout boots. Bring waterproofs and lunch.

It's your chance to help conserve wildlife actively!

Contact Details

The Angus and Dundee Group website is at myweb.tiscali.co.uk/adbswt

and you can email on adbswt@tiscali.co.uk

The SWT's home Web Pages are at www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk



Group	Leader	Meeting Place	Phone
Montrose	Watch leader	Basin Visitor Centre	01674 676336

(SWT Family Membership includes children's **WATCH** membership)

July 2017 Newsletter Copy Deadline - 22nd May 2017

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for July to November 2017 that should be included in the next newsletter, please send it as soon as possible to the editor at the email address

jim.strath91@gmail.com

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