



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

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Dundee and Angus Wildlife News

Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future

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

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Introduction

As you will read in the following pages, we've had a series of excellent winter meetings and the sun shone on our latest wildlife excursion. Can it last? We certainly hope so and look forward to your continuing support. We're also very interested to hear of your own ideas and suggestions about how we could improve the meetings and ideas for excursions next year. Any proposals? And then please think about joining in to help the work of the Trust in Angus. It's interesting to learn more about local wildlife and conservation and about the workings of the Trust. We all lead busy lives but surely **you** could spend a little time helping out along the Miley, at one of our bag-packing sessions, leading an outing or joining one of our local reserve sub-committees, even the main Members' Groups committee? We are **very** keen to receive more help!

Marine Conservation Talk

Thursday 16th March

When do you last remember a talk that included a quiz session? It exposed – although gracefully – our general lack of knowledge about the longevity on Scottish beaches of a variety of different types of litter. Our enthusiastic and articulate speaker, Catherine Gemmel of the Marine Conservation Society, lined up a group of volunteers, each with a lump of plastic, chunk of glass or similar item of beach litter, in front of the large and enthusiastic audience and then asked roughly how long these pieces would last on our beaches. I'm not sure whether our

audience scored any better than the members of the Scottish Parliament – although I suspect we may have been worse! It certainly made for a memorable evening.

After an unfortunate late start due to the building being locked without a caretaker on site, we heard about the myriad forms of marine life along and in beaches with highlights including dolphins and other cetaceans and even one or two sea turtles. In fact, of the many props that Catherine had with her, the most impressive was a full-size blow-up model of a leather-back turtle, which certainly gave a good idea of the sheer bulk of the animals. Reports of these turtles, along with basking sharks, Catherine told us, are an important form 'Citizen Science' since the MCS and other bodies rely on the general public for many records.

The relatively small island of Britain is surrounded by an astonishing total of 11,000 miles of coastline, of which 60% is Scottish and Scotland hosts 45% of the breeding sea birds of Europe. Our waters host a rich diversity of life, with a total of 7,500 species of organisms recorded around British coasts.

However, they are threatened by many forms of pollution, including sewage from 20,000 sewage and overflow pipes although the situation has improved greatly in recent years. More worrying are plastic wastes which when they breakdown often absorb toxins and end up inside zooplankton, thus affecting marine food chains. Tangled fishing nets and lines are another current problem. Surveys of Scottish beaches have revealed up to 46,000 pieces of litter, largely plastic items, per mile! Catherine told us that one solution is to remove as much as possible at source. For instance, worldwide the enormous total of 500 billion carrier bags are produced every year, many of which are discarded after use. In this part of the world, carrier bag litter is down by 43% after the introduction of the 5p per bag tax. The MCS and others are running campaigns against micro-beads (microscopic plastic spheres in some cosmetics and similar uses) and against balloons. Also ongoing are television campaigns against plastic bottles. She finished a most informative and well-presented talk by reminding us of the 'Beach Watch' clean-up sessions along our coast, from Friday to Monday, over the 3rd weekend of September.

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 27th April

The Chairman, Jim Cook, began the meeting by welcoming the large number of members who'd come along on a chilly evening (we'd had to provide extra chairs) and then proceeded into the agenda. He reported on the success of the outings during the summer and autumn of 2016 and of the memorably sunny winter walk this past January. He also reported the excellent attendances at the two evening talks, on wildcats in November and Marine Conservation in March then went on to thank the Treasurer and the Secretary, particularly, for her important work and excellent organisational skills. Peter Bainbridge, our Treasurer, then presented the financial report, showing that the out-goings of the local group this year were considerably higher than our income. However, the Group funds were still in a healthy state. A short session of elections followed. Finally, Liz Houghton, the local group's Secretary, introduced and discussed the annual report from the Dundee Conservation Volunteers. After a short discussion on items of general business the chairman declared the meeting closed and introduced the speaker for the evening, to talk about Sea Eagles.

Sea Eagles on the East Coast

Owen Selly, of the sea eagles officer for the RSPB, enthralled the large audience with a well-rounded and informative talk about these great birds of prey, which are the largest birds now in Britain which are aptly described as 'flying barn doors'. He began by telling us that once they were common, there still being 280 place names in the country in which the birds feature. It is estimated that 1500 years ago there were between 800 and 1,500 pairs breeding around our coasts. The last birds were seen on the Orkney island of Hoy in 1916. The good news is that 99 years later they arrived back there.

The birds were first reintroduced to the western island of Rum starting in 1975 and then from 1993 to 1998 in Wester Ross. Releases of 85 birds in Eastern Scotland took place between 2007 and 2012. All have been sourced from nests with two eggs around the coasts of Norway. The young birds are released at 14 weeks of age, having been kept in conditions with minimum human contact, and are wing-tagged and fitted with VHF transmitters before flying free but losses have been considerable. It is thought that in 2016 there were total of 106 breeding pairs, significant since it has been found that wild-fledged birds survive 66% more successfully than their released parents. Nest locations can be difficult to find and reports from the public are important.

Their diet is varied, not just fish and marine life. In fact, on average only 10% of food items are fish. They predate or scavenge many mammals and birds including deer and grouse, even chaffinches, and other items such as octopus. The main threats to sea eagle survival include collisions with power-lines and vehicles, especially trains, conflict with other eagles, persecution of adults and disturbance, especially when sitting on eggs.

Wing tagging and radio transmitters may help to provide evidence for prosecutions as well being important for monitoring dispersal and providing information on behaviour. The birds form an ideal species for 'engagement with



nature'. Their future seems bright and may see a forecast of possibly as many as 800 breeding pairs in 2040. After an interesting question and answer session, we thanked Owen for his presentation; a

Hugh Ingram, an Appreciation

We all were very saddened in March to hear of the sudden passing of Dr Hugh AP Ingram. His has been a powerful voice for conservation and the environment for many years. As one of the speakers remarked at his well-attended memorial service, only two days before he'd had an encouraging email from Hugh prompting him to further efforts – entirely typical. The service at Dunbog in North Fife brought together a considerable number of relatives and friends along with colleagues and former students from his working life at the University of Dundee, from the Trust, both locally and nationally, and from a number of the other organisations with which he'd been involved.

Hugh has been a very important member of the Scottish Wildlife Trust since its foundation 50 years ago. He's played a vital role both locally, here in Angus, and nationally, as chairman of the Trust's Council in Edinburgh, helping to guide the SWT through a difficult period. Hugh played an essential role in setting up one of our most important reserves in Angus, Balgavies Loch, and helped manage it for many years. He also served as chairman of our local committee and contributed valuable ideas, suggestions and advice over a long period.

With his great knowledge of conservation biology and vast array of friends and contacts throughout Scotland and much further afield, he was a highly valued colleague and guiding hand. Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife, Ruth, herself a well-respected biologist, and to his family. He will be greatly missed.

Montrose Bag-pack

Saturday 8th April

The Easter period seemed to be a good time to conduct a bag-packing session in a local supermarket. This time Barbara Thompson had organised us to meet up in the Tesco supermarket in Montrose and the whole exercise proved to be excellent. A good-sized group, included Trust members from Dundee and Angus as well as several from Montrose itself and further north. Toby Burrel, in fact, had joined us from Laurencekirk. Armed with our SWT sashes and collecting buckets, we met a little before 10am and we started offering our services on the hour.

Everyone was good enough to contribute at least a two-hour stint, but a group of stalwarts including Mary and Tom Harwood and Margaret and Peter Bainbridge with a few other members remained hard at work until the agreed end.

Due to both the numbers of members willing to donate hours of their time and to the generosity of the good people of Montrose, we had a very successful day and netted just over £900. This was split between the two parties who took part, the Angus and Dundee group and the North Angus group, according to the numbers of members from each involved. It formed a very welcome boost for our funds.

Errol Reed-beds Outing

Sunday 14th May

A lovely warm and sunny afternoon with a brisk westerly wind welcomed a considerably larger group than the expected total who'd booked. Members from far and near came along, including a couple from Helensburgh. However, we all found enough parking in the Carse of Gowrie village of Errol. Our leader, former local lass Liz Houghton, led the party down to the reed beds. On the way, some of us examined an oak tree carrying a selection of large and small growing oak-apple galls, all still pale and soft. At the edge of the path above the reeds a large spread of sweet woodruff with its white flowers attracted attention.

Down the slope in the reed beds our sightings of interesting birds, plants and other wildlife increased. The harsh chattering of sedge warblers came from the dry reed stalks all around, along with the calls of a smaller number of reed warblers. Within a few minutes a marsh harrier could be seen crossing the path ahead. Liz led the way along a reasonably dry path along one of the drainage pipes and out towards the edge of the mud. We were interested to see one of the deep drainage channels and then the large extent of the mudflats exposed by the low tide in front of us. Several members caught glimpses of the most

hoped-for birds, bearded reedlings or tits, on the way back while others saw a few perched reed buntings.

This most interesting afternoon excursion was finished off by Liz leading the group along the path to the left along the top of the bank to Port of Allan. Once again, lots of wildlife was in evidence – several calling blackcaps, one or two chiffchaffs, willow warblers, song thrushes and blackbirds among others, plus bluebells, sweet cicely, pig-nut and other woodland plants. One small stretch allowed a good view out over the vast area of reed beds. It had been an excellent start to our summer programme.

News from the Reserves

Balgavies: It's been a very mild winter and a markedly dry spring but in the last few weeks winter migrants have departed north, the plants have sprouted and are covered in flowers and the summer migrants have showed up. The bridge to the cottage, destroyed in last year's floods, has been repaired and improved. A few cows are on the land at the east end and we hope to have a few more grazing the overgrown south meadow. As well as this change, a comprehensive survey of the small insects of this important area of grassland is planned for this summer. Also, you will be pleased to know that the ospreys are back although the old female has not returned and the male has a new partner.

The Miley: The Miley is considerably cleaner and much improved for the summer after the work described in the Dundee Group report. There's been a little spraying of graffiti in the tunnel but we hope to remove it soon. The spring flowers have come and gone and the summer migrants are all back and active. Hopefully, a number of our bird boxes have been occupied; certainly good numbers of territorial birds seem to around.

Seaton Cliffs: We've had a mild and remarkably dry winter, compared to last year. Along the cliffs all the birds are back nesting or feeding well-grown young. A colourful array of wild flowers peppers the cliff tops with pink and white and the plants down in Carlingsheugh Bay are sprouting vigorously. It's well worth a visit; why not choose a fine summer evening for a very pleasant and interesting wildlife stroll – or at any of our other reserves?

Dundee Group

The weekly litter-picks along the Miley have been taking place, as usual, although several of the teams have mentioned that they think there's less lying around, particularly plastic bags. Perhaps this has been due to the government's 5p tax on every new bag. The usual problems remain, though, of thoughtless dog walkers not clearing up after their animals. Probably only a few, but regular, walkers are responsible.

Miley Clean-up

Sunday 23rd April

A small number of our usual keen members joined the team from John Whyman's Dundee Conservation Volunteers in the biennial large-scale clean-up. Most of the group got to work, some pulling rubbish from amongst the dead vegetation while others cleared the path itself and a few dug out the ditches on one side or other of the path and cut back the rampant bramble stems.

Within a short time we had amassed a considerable pile of assorted rubbish but continued hard at work until midday. By then, all of us were more than ready for a bite of lunch and, anyway, the

DCV group had an engagement for the Law in the afternoon. We gathered for a photo session beside the rubbish pile at the Loons Road end before leaving.



Dates for your Diary

- Sunday 30th July** Visit to sporting estate at head of Glen Isla. Guided visit with the gamekeeper. Meet at 2pm at Fergus, (NO 193682) Turn Rt off B951 past Forter Castle. Bring binoculars.
- Sunday 10th September** Family afternoon. Pond Dipping at Balgavies. Hunt for bugs in meadows and loch. Meet at 2pm in Balgavies Loch car park. (NO528509). Wear wellies.
- Thursday 16th November** "Moths by Moonlight" Talk by Paul Brooks on his moth trapping in Angus. 7:30pm in Upper Reid Hall, Castle St. Forfar. Admission £3.50 adults, accompanying children free.

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)

November 2017 Newsletter Copy Deadline - 18th September 2017

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for December 2017 to April 2018 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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