

**Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future**

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

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**Number 134 - March 2021**

### Annual General Meeting

Thursday 19th November

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The long-delayed AGM was unique – and we hope it will remain so – in that it took place entirely on-line on ‘zoom’ although only about 25 of our members took the opportunity. Andy Wakelin in Montrose handled all the zoom arrangements very competently, as usual. Unfortunately the chair was indisposed and Secretary Liz Houghton had to step in at short notice. The event was necessarily shorter than usual, mostly due to the effects of the covid-19 lock-down curtailing our activities. The finances have been taken over by Robin Key, our new Treasurer, after long and meritorious service by Peter Bainbridge. The fund-raising events in 2019 were highly successful, the spring plant sale produced a goodly sum and the bag-pack in Morrisons in Arbroath broke all records. Generally, our bank accounts are in a healthy state, you will be pleased to know, although several bills are expected in the coming year. However, our income this past year has been much affected due to the virus, with no plant sale in the spring and no bag-packing in December either. After thanking Robin and Peter, the meeting moved on to report that the Dundee Conservation Volunteers had not met for many months but are hopeful to restart their vital activities in the coming year. Liz gave a brief review of the local group's activities the previous year, 2019, starting with the summer outings, all of which were well attended and provided fascinating finds and good sightings of wildlife. The visit to May Island was especially productive of sea birds of all kinds but also plants and some molluscs and insects. In August the Bankhead Moss excursion, along with members of Tayside and Fife Fungal Group, also proved productive, as did the Barry-Buddon visit which was deliberately organised for a much later time of year than usual to record those species that only appear late on in the season. Then she moved on to the excellent talks on ‘Mountain Hares’ by Scott Newey in November and in February Blair Wilkie's ‘Wildlife Crime’, shortly before lock-down, both of which were well received.

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### Introduction

Need we mention that a certain virus infection has altered life and activities for all of us? Need we also mention that the Trust's activities have been greatly affected as well? However, the zoom meetings, although by no means perfect, have allowed some of our programme to take place in modified form. The weather was memorable as well. After the beautifully warm and dry spring, at least until the end of May, the break in the weather in the autumn particularly, greatly affected wildlife – although it was a great year for fungi! Then the freezing cold and the snow in January and early February, at the time of writing, seemed to promise a renewal of the life in the spring, in all senses of the phrase.

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### IMPORTANT FOR ALL MEMBERS

If you didn't receive notice of the AGM and talk or of the cancellation of the usual January outing, then please make sure that you are able to receive notification using the new system run by HQ in Edinburgh. It's easy; just go on to the SWT main website, move down to the bottom of the first page and click on the button in the blue-band to register. You'll be asked to give your name and email address and then click on the box for local group information. You can choose as well whether or not you want to receive other types of information.

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

We regret to record the sudden death of Bob McCurley, who had organised and led the Barry-Buddon excursions for so many years. His ebullient nature, his enthusiasm, his vast knowledge of wildlife,

birds in particular and his warm and welcoming approach to all will be much missed. These outings will hardly be the same without him.

Due to the late withdrawal of the advertised speaker due to a family bereavement, the talk that followed the AGM was by Andy Wakelin, the Chair of the North Angus group, on a 'Tale of Two Ponds'. Andy amply demonstrated his talents as a naturalist and his skill as a wildlife photographer during his talk. He was able to delight the audience with a great selection of photos of birds, insects and plants from the two "urban" ponds in Montrose observed over many years. He deserved a good round of applause at the end of his talk.

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## Outing

Sunday 10th January

Unfortunately, as you all know, we had to cancel our winter morning walk along the dunes and coast at Elliott (to be followed by a convivial lunch) since the covid-19 lock-down regulations prevented any such gatherings. Not only that, but part of the coastal path had been destroyed by stormy weather late last year. It was the latest of a series of forced cancellations of outings and other events that we hope will not have to be continued too long into the current year.

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## News from the Reserves

**Balgavies Loch** At the time of writing the loch was nearly completely frozen over but there had been numbers of geese earlier, and some of the usual ducks and other water birds are congregating around the mouth of the Lunan burn where the slightly warmer water stops the water from icing-over. Due to the virus the hide is locked again, which means the birds can be viewed only from the path – which you might have seen has been under maintenance where repair is necessary. The dead ash saplings, killed by ash die-back disease, have been cleared and the laurels around the station have been cut back as well as much of the sycamore re-growth. Ken Slater put up a number of new nest-boxes around the reserve to encourage more of the woodland birds to nest.

Funding for a new fence beside the road above the over-grown meadow on the southern side has been approved. The damp meadow used to hold a good selection of wildlife, both interesting plants and many small creatures but, without regular grazing of the tough dominating grasses, has been gradually degrading for years. If we can erect a new fence – finally – then the Highland cattle could start grazing it regularly again and we would hope that it will gradually return to its previous diversity. The work

cannot start, though, until the after the current lock-down has been lifted. Fingers crossed!

**Lintrathen Loch** Lintrathen Loch has been frozen as well but also had a busy time in the peak migration season, with large numbers of visiting geese and ducks. The colder weather, though, has driven most of them further south. Since then the loch has been quiet. Not surprisingly, after all the rain, the loch is full to bursting and the weir is flowing strongly. Maintenance work has been carried out on the paths and both hides.

**Montrose Basin** The Basin welcomed the usual large flocks of migrating pinkfoot geese in October and November, but most have moved further south – a little like a seasonal truck-stop. The mud-flats have attracted some other interesting birds. Pintail could be seen feeding with the wigeon and teal flocks and a large white egret has been sighted around the Lurgies a number of times more recently.

**Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath** The cliffs remain an excellent place to see interesting wildlife at almost any time of year, plants, seals and cetaceans throughout the year, breeding birds in spring and a good show of flowers in spring and summer. This past year the seabirds breeding on the cliffs had an excellent year, particularly the kittiwakes fledging more chicks than usual. The fulmars, always early breeders, are beginning to gather already in anticipation of spring. As usual the gorse is in bloom and bright green rounded leaves of scurvy grass are evident.



However, the winter storms have extracted a considerable toll on the cliffs, particularly at the top of the 'Seaman's Grave,' where a path diversion was put in several years ago. A huge lump has been torn out of the cliff and a section of the old tarmac path is completely undermined. Even although warning signs have been painted on either side of the diversion, some people persist in using the old path. It is extremely unsafe, if not DOWNRIGHT DANGEROUS! Joggers have been spotted recently trotting over it and several times young lads – some of whom seem to think they are invincible – have been biking over it. We are very worried that a tragedy will occur there one day! Please don't even think about taking the short route there – use the new path – and also encourage all others to keep off the old path.

**The Miley, Dundee** The Miley continues as a welcome relief from the traffic and noise in the surrounding area. And the usual maintenance work was at least partly able to

continue. Before the most recent lock-down occurred during the winter, individual members had been able to travel to the Miley to continue litter picking, although there is somewhat less litter since the footfall along the Miley seems to have decreased. Tom has been along several times to try to keep the drains running freely and reduce further flooding. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions, we were not able to organise the usual autumn leaf-clear and as a result the path is back to a rather muddy state in parts.

The good news, though, is that Rab Potter, the SWT North-east Scotland Reserves Manager, has been able to obtain a quote from a local firm for clearing the ditches properly, perhaps with a small excavator. And now new funding is due in. We are negotiating

to alter the size and terms of the quote and hope to arrange for this work to be done some time during the coming year.

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## Dundee Group

Like all other SWT groups, the Dundee Group's activities have been greatly curtailed. The group has not been able to organise any indoor meetings, of course, and all outdoor work along the Miley has been severely restricted.

However, as you can see below, the Group got another certificate for their efforts.



Dear Mary,  
Congratulations on your attached Certificate which we hope recognises the tremendous contribution that your group - Dundee Miley Group - has made to the Beautiful Scotland and It's Your Neighbourhood activity throughout 2020.

This year has been unique, and we know that this will have challenged your group in many different ways, but everyone at Keep Scotland Beautiful knows just how important your work will have been to the communities where you live. The lockdown in the Spring has reminded us all of the importance of our local environment and created a greater awareness

of the natural world around us. The inspiration that you will have provided local people cannot be underestimated, but the programme will have also provided important opportunities for you as volunteers to focus on positive activity in response to the pandemic. Thank you for the incredible activity that you undertake on a daily basis around our communities - we are delighted to recognise and celebrate your amazing work.

With kind regards,  
Barry Fisher  
Chief Executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful

## Autumn and Winter Local Wildlife



Brambling

Our usual winter migrant bird life has arrived from Iceland and Scandinavia, the skeins of geese and many others, although redwing and fieldfare numbers seem to have declined. The real

spectacles, as expected, were at Montrose Basin at dusk and, especially, dawn with the gabbling of thousands of geese and the roar of their wings. In contrast, a few very late swallows, probably third broods, were seen as late as early October and red squirrels have been seen in a few new areas. There have been only a few waxwings reported this winter, plus a few interesting records such as bramblings and snow buntings.

Barbara Thompson

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## Diary Dates

Thursday 4th March 2021

*How to be a Bad Wildlife Photographer.*

Illustrated talk by Andy Wakelin. 7:30 pm via Zoom  
(email address below for link)

Thursday 22nd April 2021

*The Bessy Ducker Story* Talk by Ken Slater,  
following short AGM. 7:30 pm via Zoom  
(email [info@swtdundeeangus.org.uk](mailto:info@swtdundeeangus.org.uk) for link)

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### July Newsletter Copy Deadline - 11th May 2021

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events for July to November 2021 that should be included in the next newsletter, please send it as soon as possible to the editor at [jim.strath91@gmail.com](mailto:jim.strath91@gmail.com)

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### Montrose Basin Visitor Centre News

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre will be open when Covid restrictions allow. Check on the websites below for the latest news.

More details can be found on  
[www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)  
or  
[www.montrosebasin.org.uk](http://www.montrosebasin.org.uk)

### The World "Wild" Web

Angus and Dundee Group website is at  
[swtdundeeangus.org.uk](http://swtdundeeangus.org.uk)  
and you can email on  
[info@swtdundeeangus.org.uk](mailto:info@swtdundeeangus.org.uk)

The SWT's home Web Pages are at  
[www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)



Scottish Wildlife Trust Family Membership includes children's Wildlife Watch membership  
For activity programme see the website at:  
[tinyurl.com/SWTMontroseW](http://tinyurl.com/SWTMontroseW)

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### 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!

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The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland (registered number SC040247), having its registered office at Harbourside House, 110 Commercial Street, Edinburgh EH6 6NF.  
It is also a Scottish registered charity (charity number SC005792).