

# Dundee and Angus Wildlife News



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

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**Number 138 - March 2023**

## Welcome

The local group has this last year began to finally recover from the effects of the covid-19 pandemic, holding the first open face-to-face meetings since the Blair Wilkie talk on Wildlife Crime in early 2020 and organising the first fully unrestricted outings and other activities. The weather during the past summer was exceptionally warm and dry, as we all remember, and brought lots of people out into the countryside. Our autumn 2022 fungus foray to the large conifer plantations of Montreathmont Forest in central Angus was highly successful and in November the excellent lecture in Forfar attracted a good audience.

Both events encourage the committee to think that there is enough interest in local wildlife among the 1,000 or so Trust members in Angus and Dundee to continue. However, we face a very great difficulty that will severely hamper our continuing activities, as you will read below.

far have heard of no volunteers. Would anyone in our (quite large) current local membership like to join in and help? You do NOT need to be a wildlife expert or have any previous experience, we are more than willing to help you start.

**Without any takers this local group is likely to cease most activities that benefit YOU and function almost as a 'care and maintenance' committee for at least a few more years. YOU must step up and join in. We need help this year! Sitting back to let "someone else do it" is no longer an option! We are desperate for new committee members of any age!**

If you would like to help, please talk to any member of the committee, go to our website or phone Liz Houghton, Dundee (01382) 775462, or Mary Harwood, Dundee 689343.



## URGENT APPEAL TO MEMBERS

All members of this Local Group of the Trust should be aware that we're in serious trouble. As the Chair said at the November lecture, we are losing our Secretary at the next AGM. Liz Houghton has been a most effective and efficient Secretary for nearly 20 years and wanting to retire for several years but finally has had enough.

It is impossible to function as a group without a Secretary and she must be replaced. Unfortunately, as yet we have no replacement(s). The job could be split into several tasks – such as a minutes secretary, a communication secretary and an activities secretary. The work-load on any one individual would be greatly reduced. Anybody like to help?

It is possible, also, to function in any of those positions without physically attending all meetings in person, which means that you don't actually need to live in the area; you would be able to function by attending at least some of the meetings via zoom.

We are losing several other committee members at the same AGM as well, particularly the chair, and really need to replace them all. We could limp along with a much reduced committee membership but, so



## Congratulations! Long Service Award for Mary and Tom Harwood

Mary and Tom Harwood have been very hard-working members of and for the local group for nearly 25 years. Mary in particular has been the chief organiser of both the local Dundee support group of the Trust and of the work along the Miley. This is one of the few urban Trust reserves, along the old and long-disused railway line between Lochee and Clepington Road. It forms a refuge for a wide variety of wildlife – birds, plants, tiny creatures such as insects and small mammals including occasional visits by red squirrels – and, perhaps not surprisingly, is roughly a mile long. If you haven't been there, it's well worth a visit!

Mary organises pairs of volunteers to walk along the Miley once a week and pick up the litter that has been left along the path or blown in. They also check and empty the litter bins. Each pair follows Mary's rota and visit every six or seven weeks. Tom is a great help who, as well as taking his turn to clear up the litter, does a lot of the heavy work along the Miley,

sorting out the drainage in particular. The pair also organise a yearly leaf-clear in late autumn to sweep up the fallen leaf litter and cart it away to prevent the dead leaves from rotting down and being ground into mud. Finally, the pair organise and take part in a major clear-up along the Miley every second year along with the DCV, the Dundee Conservation Volunteers, a group run by John Whyman.

Another major effort by the pair is to organise the annual spring plant sale, mostly of garden flowers and vegetables. They arrange the venue, in the City Council garden in Dawson park, encourage volunteer plant growers, pick up many of the donations and play major roles in the sale itself. These sales usually bring in around £600 every year to aid the local group in its conservation work in Trust reserves in Angus and on the Miley itself, of course. To help bring in more funding, Mary devises a wildlife quiz which every year gathers in another £100 or so. Furthermore, until shortly before the lock-downs caused by the pandemic, they organised a squad of volunteers and played a major part in an annual flag day in Dundee to collect small donations from the public into a series of the Trust's official collecting cans. These efforts would usually raise several hundred pounds for the Trust's work. They also led the team of Dundee volunteers to set up and run a Trust stand at the annual Dundee Flower Show in Camperdown park every autumn until the pandemic.

SWT Vice-Chair Tim Duffy visited Dundee in October specially to present the award and a small ceremony was arranged for the formal presentation. Fittingly, it was held in the Miley local reserve itself and a photographer was there to record the proceedings. Fortunately it was a pleasant day. Photographs appeared in the local papers and the Trust's Magazine and, in case you missed them, in this newsletter.



We should note that Mary has taken on another vitally important role for this Local Trust Group recently. She has also become our Treasurer on an interim basis to take over the post from Robin Key, who has been forced by illness to withdraw from the role this past year. We wish him well.

## Robin Key - an Appreciation

Robin has served the Local Group well in the important role of Treasurer, demonstrating his effective use of spreadsheets and an understanding of the inputs and outputs of our funds. Unfortunately he has not been well but was able to cope with the job as best as he could for a year or two. Then the increasing problems meant that he had to withdraw and we were very fortunate to find someone else willing and able to take over for at least a short time. Our thoughts go with him.



## It's Your Neighbourhood Award

January 2023

On behalf of the local group, Mary and Tom Harwood received the Level Four – Thriving – Award with a Certificate of Distinction for the excellent condition of the Miley at a recent ceremony in Victoria Park Garden in Dundee.

This continues the presentations of the awards over the last decade or so during which the levels have gradually increased to the current Level Four. They indicate the years of dedicated work by our teams of volunteers.



## Wildlife in Glen Clova

Thursday 17th November

Hugh Bell, the Ranger-Naturalist based partly in the Glen Doll Centre at the Braedownie car park (and a wildfowl warden at the Montrose Basin and Crombie country park), enthralled an audience of more than 25 members and guests in the Meffan Gallery in Forfar, the first face-to-face lecture since early 2020. He began by describing the winter Glen and the effects of the lock-downs in 2020 and 2021 and then Storm Arwen in November 2021. He continued on to show a series of striking images of a great variety of the birds, insects and mammals that frequent and even breed in the area.

A small population of golden eagles can be seen, which is expected of a top predator, spread around 5 eyries along with Peregrines, Sparrowhawks and other raptors, including visits by the occasional Sea Eagle. The smaller birds included Golden Plovers and a small population of Dotterels, Woodpeckers, Redstarts, Twite, Crossbills and Spotted Flycatchers. Good populations of butterflies were represented by

Comma, Orange-tip and Common Blue butterflies, Fritillaries, Scotch and Northern Brown Argus, Ringlets and Mountain Ringlets plus the recently-arrived Speckled Wood butterflies. Damselflies around are Large Reds, Emeralds and Common Blues along with Golden-Ringed and Common Hawker Dragonflies. There are healthy populations of Red Squirrels, predators such as Wild Cats, Stoats and Pine Martins, Otters but Mountain Hares have declined significantly over the last 50 years.

The fascination among his audience was shown by the interesting question and answer session, followed by a spirited vote of thanks. The Chair also described the dire situation in the local group committee with the retirement in the near future of the Secretary and appealed for volunteers.



## News from the Reserves

### Balgavies Loch, near Forfar

Not surprisingly, the loch and surrounding land has suffered severely several times from flooding in recent years and, in particular, from topsoil movement off the sloping fields across the main road at the south-west end of the loch. Several years ago the last major water run-off episode dumped many tons of this rich silt onto the track down to Weilstaves Cottage, totally blocking the way. A large digger had to be brought in to clear the track and restore the situation. A relatively small SuDS (Sustainable Drainage System) pond was dug into the ground at the base of the slope on the other side of the Forfar to Arbroath road. Unfortunately, though, it has proved unable to cope with recent torrential rains.

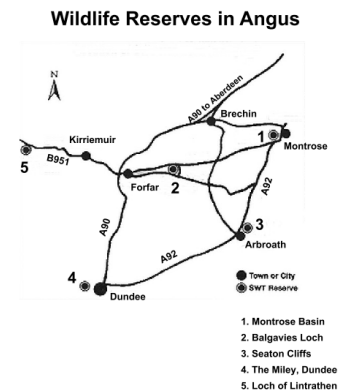
Nature Scot advised the Trust it has decided to dig a much larger but fairly shallow SuDS pond with a vegetation zone at the slightly lower end to filter out the silt and at least some of the excess nutrients before the water drains into the Loch. The work is planned for this coming summer and will be dug into the end of the large south meadow near the path down to the hide and will divert the water and silt away from the cottage road. Once fully re-vegetated, the bank will be relatively unobtrusive. The grazier is reported as more than happy to dig out the silt in the summer and spread it over his own fields.

The hide has deteriorated recently due to the leaking roof and needs to be dried out and restored. Rab Potter, the Trust's north-east reserves manager, is buying more roofing felt and will have the roof repaired.

The fence on the top of the bank between the south meadow and the busy main road is being repaired and it is thought that the grazier will bring in a small number of hardy cattle. Grazing of the meadow is much needed to maintain the flower-rich diversity. How long the fence will last remains to be seen.

### Lintrathen Loch

The loch has attracted good numbers of over-wintering geese and ducks this past autumn and will continue to provide a haven for wildlife into the spring and summer. However the roofs of both the hides have been leaking and the conditions inside have deteriorated. Rab Potter is organising a supply of fresh roofing felt and will renew the roof covering to stop the inflow of rain.



### Montrose Basin

The Visitor Centre continues to receive a good number of visitors and they have been lucky enough to see kingfisher and water rail as well as the usual fare of wigeon, teal, pintail and redshank. The pink footed goose numbers have dwindled as usual, but can still be heard coming back to roost after dark.

The visitors are also enjoying the new telescopes recently acquired from Viking Optical and funded by a funeral collection and the North Angus Group.

The area in front of the Centre has been re-profiled to remove the overgrown reeds and grass and improve the biodiversity. This work was carried out by Angus Council with a Nature Restoration grant.

### Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath

The scenery and abundant wildlife of the cliffs continue to attract members and visitors of all kinds. Several volunteers help clear litter regularly.

The coastguard agency has dug in a series of new large and distinctive numbered posts beside the path along the top of the cliffs to enable help to be summoned rapidly and precisely in case of accidents. The Trust also is going to place a new series of numbered recycled-plastic posts close to the old wooden posts. There should be no confusion with the coastguard posts. The path further along in the Reserve area past Dickmont's Den continues to deteriorate slowly and will need to be repaired at some time in the future.

### The Miley, Dundee

The Miley continues to thrive under the tender care of Tom and Mary Harwood, as described previously in this newsletter. Our team of voluntary litter clearers has continued to operate as before. The ditch along one side has been fully dug out at last and the water is running down to the drain under the Harefield Road bridge. Unfortunately it fills up rapidly with dead leaves and silt from the very steep partly bare bank and will continue to need being dug out almost annually.

## Dundee Group News

The most important activity in the last few months was a major leaf-clear in the autumn. We have been unable to do this effectively over the previous two years because of the pandemic and a layer of mud was starting to build up over the hard surface of chippings on the path. Mary and Tom arranged, over two days in October, for small teams of volunteers to work along the path resulting in a major restoration of it and the ditch and control of some of the encroaching brambles and roses.



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## Programme

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|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Thursday 9th March</b>   | Talk on <i>Angus Reptiles</i> by Trevor Rose<br>Meffan Gallery, Forfar 7:30pm                        |
| <b>Thursday 13th April</b>  | AGM followed by Talk on <i>Wildlife in Bhutan</i> by Alban Houghton<br>Meffan Gallery, Forfar 7:30pm |
| <b>Sunday 23rd April</b>    | Walk up Glen Esk with Trevor Rose looking for reptiles   |
| <b>Sunday 3rd September</b> | Barry Buddon Nature Day  |

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## Montrose Basin Visitor Centre News

Opening times from mid-Feb to Oct 31<sup>st</sup> are:  
Every day, 10:30am-5pm.



More details can be found on  
[www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)  
Or  
[www.facebook.com/MontroseBasin/](https://www.facebook.com/MontroseBasin/)

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

### 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)

More information about Montrose Basin can be found at  
[www.montrosebasin.org.uk](http://www.montrosebasin.org.uk)

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## Dundee Conservation Volunteers

Contact John Whyman at  
[dundeeconservationvolunteers@hotmail.com](mailto:dundeeconservationvolunteers@hotmail.com) or on  
07731 893374 for details of the next task. A Sunday activity takes place about once a month. No experience required, but you need lunch, boots, work clothes and waterproofs.

It is your chance to conserve wildlife actively!

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### March Newsletter Copy Deadline - 29th May 2023

If you have any report or item of news or details of future events 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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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).