



**Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust**

## **Ayrshire Newsletter Spring 2015**

### Chairman's note.

Since moving to Largs four years ago I have become even more aware of the size and diversity of the county. Girvan now seems a long way away, let alone Lendalfoot and Ballantrae. With the distance from north to south and the changes from our magnificent coastlines to the hills inland come a great variety of wildlife opportunities and a few different problems. In the southern and central regions you are getting used to seeing nuthatches in your woodlands. Up here we are just hearing odd reports as we wait for the steady northward spread of the species to bring them to us in numbers. Another species that may have designs on Ayrshire as a new home is the Pine Marten. They are in the far south on the edge of the Galloway forest area and there have been a handful of possible sightings right in the north of the county. Will they close in on the central regions in the coming decades? Grey Squirrels watch out if they do!

Alongside the varied opportunities to see so many special animals, plants and fungi there are also some regional problems; and we try to keep an eye on these too. At the risk of over-simplifying the situation, I would say that the main problem in the south is the spread of wind farms; in the central area there are a few large housing proposals that will need to be watched; and in the north we have apparently survived the threat of a massive coal fired power station on a SSSI but we still have a few smaller wind and coastal developments to concern us, as well as the proposed "Largs Forest". However I think it is in parts of East Ayrshire that we see the biggest problems at present, with mining, wind farms and commercial forestry threatening to coalesce and squeeze the life out of the few remaining areas of more natural countryside. The scars of unrestored opencast mining sites are a headache that could, potentially, become an opportunity for habitat creation. We are looking for ways in which the SWT could realistically hope to improve the situation. There will be help from staff, but assistance from local members, even if it is just writing letters to the local council, will be very valuable. If you have any experience of opencast mining or subsequent restoration, or are just willing to get involved, we would love to hear from you.

As I write this there is snow lying in the garden and we seem to be locked into the winter. However, by the time you are reading it I hope you will have seen the first spring flowers and be thinking about summer birds returning from the Mediterranean or Africa. 2015 promises to be an eventful year for us in Ayrshire. As described in Gill Smart's note below, we should have three new people working in the county. The Community Engagement Officer should give us a great opportunity to get better known in the area and organise/attend more events. Another change will be that our long-serving secretary, Wendy Annan, will be retiring at the AGM in April. We are very grateful for all she has done over the years and will certainly miss her guiding and informing presence. A local group can do without many things but not without a secretary – we need someone to take over this vital role. The SWT is one of those great organisations where, in time of need, somebody always seems to step forward. Please think about it.

Enough of business. Enjoy the lengthening days and get out into our local reserves with their new spring life.

Roger Hissett.

## **Ayrshire staff team expands**

By the time you read this, three new people will have started to work for wildlife on your behalf. This has come about thanks to a combination of partnership working, strategic thinking and good luck. They will be based in the Irvine office for a year.

**The Wildlife Sites Officer**, funded by North Ayrshire Council, will be reviewing and surveying 149 local biodiversity sites. Last done in 2000, current data is vital for development planning, wildlife protection and habitat network projects. It will be really interesting to know how the important habitats and species in North Ayrshire are faring. News of interesting finds will be posted on the website.

**The Community Engagement Officer**, funded by William Grant and Sons, will be raising SWT's profile in the area through reserve and habitat network projects. There will be more events and activities for you to get involved in, from practical work to biological recording initiatives. The existing weekend volunteer group will also have much-needed support. Everything we do should be better publicised and reported on.

**The Nature Network Trainee**, David Meechan, is on placement with us one or two days a week from The Conservation Volunteers (TCV). He is gaining experience of working with community groups on local green space by assisting in organising volunteer work days, delivering guided walks and generally supporting the work of SWT in Ayrshire. We share David with the RSPB and Eglinton Country Park.

Gill Smart, Reserves Officer South West

## **Weekend Volunteers**

There is always room for more volunteers to join the group of keen individuals who meet once a month to help maintain our reserves. If you feel you could give a few hours then contact Gill Smart by email at [gsmart@swt.org.uk](mailto:gsmart@swt.org.uk).

## **EVENING MEETINGS PROGRAMME**

As March arrives we near the end of another season of meetings. We meet, as usual, at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month in the comfortable premises of the Horizon Hotel, Esplanade, Ayr KA7 1DT. This provides ample parking, and disabled facilities, with tea and coffee available in the interval. There is no charge for either members or non-members, so bring your friends:

**17<sup>th</sup> March** – Michael MacKinnon “Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust”. Michael, a zoologist, was born in Ayrshire and now works as a Visitor Centre Manager for the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

**21<sup>st</sup> April** – We are very pleased that, following our brief AGM, the new Chairman of Council, Robin Harper, will be speaking to us. We are sure that plenty of members will wish to take this opportunity to meet him and learn about his plans for the Trust.

## **SWT Ayrshire Group eNewsletter.**

This was circulated to possibly half of our members recently, those whose email addresses we have. If you did not receive it, but would like to, or if your email address has changed since you joined the Trust, please contact [SWTNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:SWTNewsletter@gmail.com).