

Fife and Kinross Members Centre



Fife Area Wildlife News

No 94 Summer 2015



Message from Alison Irvine, Chair



I have recently inherited a dog – a 13 year old Jack Russell called Russ who, despite his age, is very active. For the first time in 3 or 4 years I have to go out for walks twice a day come rain, hail or sunshine.

Actually I don't think Russ

appreciates the rain or the hail but he has to go and so do I. I have a choice of walks – down to the woods – a mixed beech, sitka spruce and birch wood, or up onto the hill with magnificent views of the Howe of Fife. Most days I see Roe Deer and today I heard a Tawny Owl (at 4pm, bizarrely), a Jay, numerous Blackbirds and Thrushes, as well as all the small Tits and Warblers. We are so lucky to live in a beautiful and wildlife rich area like Fife and Kinross. This set me thinking about our "local patch". Each of us no doubt has an area that is really special to us, be it a park, garden, forest, wood, coast or semi-urban derelict land. What we see there may not be particularly rare, but it keeps us connected with nature and is incredibly important in our lives. Little wonder then, if some change happens or is proposed which will destroy all or some of our patch, we will be upset and keen to do whatever we can to protect our local flora and fauna. Already in my chairmanship of the Members Group I have

had e-mails from individuals seeking support for their efforts to protect their local patch, be it from development, agricultural or forestry, or whatever. This is a very difficult issue for local SWT to become involved in. For our reserves, SSSIs, or nationally or locally protected species and habitats, the staff at head office can become involved, providing information, clarifying their position or even coming out with a full blown objection. However, SWT is not able to protect every little area of natural or semi-natural land. I know this can be difficult for members who are trying to save a "local patch" and with my newly rekindled enthusiasm for my "local patch", thanks to Russ, I empathise with anyone in such a position.

Enough of my rambling on. I'd like to thank Paul and Debra who put together a great programme of events over the winter and spring. I've not managed to attend all of them, but I particularly enjoyed the talk and photos by Christine Schulte at the joint meeting with Kinross camera club, and we had a fabulous outing to Cullaloe, when like a clever conjurer, reserve warden Alistair Shuttleworth, produced from his pockets the captures from the previous night's moth trapping. What intricate and beautiful creatures they are. The best was kept until last – an incredible Elephant Hawkmoth, shining in its bright pink and green livery. All were safely returned to the wild and left to enjoy another night. So please join us at these events if you can. They are always interesting and you will be very welcome.

Reserve Manager's Update

by Rory Sandison

June, and summer, has arrived! The flying flock's lambing for this year has been successfully completed and calving, whilst still underway, has produced four wonderful rare breed Shetland calves! At Fleecefaulds Meadow Duncan Budge, North East RPO, has been busy with his volunteers replacing the stiles, improving the short stretch of boardwalk and completing the access into the reserve from the new car park. By the time you read this a new Volunteer Voluntary Co-ordinator will be in post. We had an excellent number of applicants for the role which made the selection of the successful applicant very tricky! This new role is part of the Plantlife-led, HLF-funded, Save Our Magnificent Meadows project. The position's key responsibility will be to engage

with our brilliant volunteers who help with managing our livestock. Now that summer's here why not visit some of our reserves in Fife? The wildflowers at Fleecefaulds Meadow and Dumbarnie Links will be a riot of colour soon as will the grasslands at Cullaloe Reservoir and Lielowan Meadow.



Robertson is delighted to sponsor the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

As an infrastructure, support services and construction company we realise how important the protection of biodiversity sites is and continually monitor and update our Environmental Policy to reflect this. Our on-site monitoring ensures that we will never knowingly damage or disrupt areas of natural interest.

Nature Watching in Fife: Kelty to Lochgelly

By John Done

This is the first of a few articles describing ways of seeing the natural history of Fife using public transport. The descriptions will be of short walks taking an hour or two to those taking a whole day. Most of the walks will have alternatives so that they can be curtailed or extended as befits the weather or time available.

Let's start with a simple walk between Kelty and Lochgelly. Start this by traveling to Cowdenbeath by train and to Kelty by bus. The Kelty bus stops in the Main Street near the railway station and you should alight at the first stop in Kelty after the bus has turned left from the old main North road. If you are lucky you will have caught the service that does the scenic route through the northern parts of Cowdenbeath!

Leave the bus stop and retrace the bus route to the main road and turn left. After about quarter of a mile turn right towards Lochore Meadows Country Park. Go past the farm and follow the path until it splits. Take the left fork and continue to the bird hide. Spend some time here particularly in winter spotting the teal, wigeon, moorhen and other water birds from the hide. With luck you might hear and/or see a water rail amongst the reeds and a flock of redpoll feeding in the Silver Birch trees. In winter you have a chance to see whooper swans and if you are very lucky a smew. From the hide go towards the loch and at the junction of the paths quietly go to the bridge over the stream. Again with luck you may see a kingfisher. Come back from the bridge and continue to the side of the loch. Scan for water birds and in spring and summer there may be an osprey joining the human fishermen. Swallows, both martins and swifts may also be feeding over the water at this time of year.

You have a choice a little further on when you can stick to the edge of the loch or go through a small area of trees. The former can involve paddling if the water levels are high. The 2 paths rejoin by a gate and you can then follow the south side of the loch either close to it on grass or further away on a made up path. As you approach the east end of the loch you have another choice. You can carry on and walk round to the visitor centre and café or take the new path towards Lochgelly High School. If you have time have a drink and a snack and come back to this path. Walking towards the school watch out for yellowhammers and reed buntings perched in the trees and perhaps a dipper on the Lochfitty burn. The wet area further on is a good place for snipe in winter. Finally turn left to the school and spend a little time searching the hawthorn bushes for tree sparrows, finches and more yellowhammers. Lochgelly station is past the school about a quarter of a mile away. Depending on

which way you came to Cowdenbeath you now have a choice. Trains to Cowdenbeath are about 10 minutes to the hour and to Cardenden and Kirkcaldy about 25 minutes to the hour but do check the timetable when planning your trip.

I hope I have whetted your appetites and you will try out this walk. I have only given a selection of birds you might see on the walk, but you will no doubt see and hear many other species on and around Loch Ore.



Reed Bunting



Yellowhammer

The Newt Outing

By Paul Blackburn

On the coldest and wettest night of April a small group met at the entrance to Pitmedden Forest to learn about the work in conserving Great Crested Newts from the local expert David Bell. We drove up to the site where David took us on a tour to show us the breeding ponds and surrounding grasslands. The Pitmedden Forest site is the most northerly population of Great Crested Newts in Scotland, apart from an outlying population around

Inverness. During the breeding season in late Spring Great Crested Newts require ponds with an absence of fish in which to display, mate and lay their eggs, insect-rich grasslands for foraging during the rest of the summer and suitable hibernation sites to survive the winter.

Great Crested Newts have a short dispersal range, so 80 ponds have been dug in the forest, within 100m of each other to encourage the population to spread. The Forestry Commission have helped to create hibernation sites by packing the underside of windblown stumps with moss.

Great Crested Newts only emerge after dark. As dusk fell we heard a Woodcock roding . Once we started searching the ponds we soon found Palmate Newts and Smooth Newts but it proved harder to find a Great Crested Newt. They display at the edge of the ponds and lay their eggs carefully on the leaves of pondweed. Eventually David netted a female and since he is licensed, we were able to hold it (wearing gloves as a precaution against spreading a pathogenic fungus which has been found to attack newts on the continent). She was surprisingly heavy with a large head and it felt like holding a miniature Komodo dragon.

We also spotted several males, coming to the surface of the pond for air before disappearing into the depths. The pond where we found the Great Crested Newts had been fenced that day to prevent access by dogs. The pond had lots of debris on the surface of the water as a result of dogs splashing around. The newts then tend to lay their eggs on the detritus rather than on the leaves of pond vegetation and the survival rate is much poorer on the detritus as a result of fungal and other infections.

This was a wonderful experience and for anyone who wishes to meet a newt I'd thoroughly recommend the Fife Amphibian & Reptile Group's annual "Meet a Newt night", which is normally held annually at the start of May.



Male Great Crested Newt (Courtesy David Bell)

THE REDS MUST PINE NO MORE!

By William Roxburgh

Once upon a time, red squirrels were in plentiful, contiguous evidence all the way from London to Land's End. They are now almost totally absent there owing to invasion by their American "grey" cousins, estimated at 4m-5m in the UK currently, who out-compete reds for habitat and food, but, more seriously, about 80% of which carry the deadly squirrel pox virus, which is fatal to reds.

By comparison, it is believed, there are now only about 100,000 native reds remaining in the UK. Scotland is home to 75% of them, but our red squirrel numbers could easily dwindle dramatically in the absence of general awareness of the reds' plight, of safeguarding of habitat, and of control of the greys. Action---including, crucially, volunteer assistance---is urgently required to save our iconic reds from extinction.

European legislation on non-native, invasive species, which came into effect in January, places an obligation on governments to take action to stop them proliferating. Lists are being drawn up, and, if, as expected, grey squirrels are included, that would also benefit birds whose eggs are eaten and the trees the greys strip. The SWT has long been working on behalf of the reds in, for example, Ladybank Woods and Tentsmuir Forest, but since funding for the Fife Red Squirrel Project Officer ended in 2014, SWT has teamed up with the recently formed and already very active Fife Red Squirrel Group (FRSG---see www.fiferedsquirrelgroup.org).

One new joint initiative involves approaches to owners of woodlands of assorted sizes in east Fife to encourage grey squirrel control and provide traps, on free loan, and training in their use where required.. Interestingly, most of the large estates already have this well in hand alongside their game-keeping activities. But ,please, anyone, advise either SWT or FRSG of any woodland in Fife or Kinross that might benefit from red squirrel monitoring and grey squirrel control.

Ten key sites are now recognised as priority areas for red squirrels in Fife and Kinross. Valiant efforts are being made to avert, in Scotland generally as well as Fife and Kinross, the awful extermination experienced south of the Border before it is too late, but more volunteers are needed to monitor key sites in Spring and Autumn---early-morning walks in the woods are always wonderful and many wildlife sightings can arise, from green woodpeckers to roe deer, not to mention red squirrels! It is importantly helpful if any red or grey squirrel sightings can be reported to the Save Scotland's Red Squirrel project at <http://scotsredsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings>. For more, local information, guidance , or grateful receipt of news and constructive suggestions relative to the saving of our red squirrels, please contact FRSG or SWT. Help!



EVENTS SUMMER/ AUTUMN 2015

Any suggestions? Able to lead a walk? Give a talk? Get in touch with Paul Blackburn.



All welcome. We advise sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for outdoor events.

Sat 15th August 2.00 p.m. Outing: Beach and Dune Walk - Kinshaldy to Goose Pools

Discover the birds and plants in this little-visited area with Paul Blackburn. Meet at Kinshaldy Car Park, Tentsmuir Forest (Note £2 parking fee).

Thu 3rd September 6.45 p.m. Outing: Wildlife at Dusk - Riverside Park, Glenrothes

A chance to observe bats with Paul Blackburn.

Sun 4th October 2.00 p.m. Outing: Afternoon Walk Loch Leven

Birdwatching on the Loch and in wet woodland with Paul Blackburn

Meet at Findattie Car Park NT 170 992

Wed 14th October 7.30 p.m. Talk:

How Buglife and Fife Council are working together to involve local people in enhancing wild flower species-rich grassland in Fife. By Suzanne Bairner, Buglife. Joint meeting with the Pitcairn Society. Collydean Community Centre, Torphins Avenue, Glenrothes, KY7 6UL.

Thu 12th November 7.30 p.m. AGM and Talk

Our annual AGM will be followed by a talk, subject to be confirmed. Nominations to the committee and other enquiries to the secretary, Paul Blackburn. **Please watch our website and Facebook for further details.** Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd, Cupar. Accessible from Bonnygate car park.

Sat 14th November 1.30 p.m.

Shore birding led by Paul Blackburn. Links Rd car park, Tayport NO 465 282

MOTHING EVENTS LED BY TIM BRAIN

Fri 21st August – Dumbarrie Links. Meet in shore car park at 8.30pm.

Sat 12th September - Bankhead Moss. Meet in car park at 7.30pm.

Fri 9th October – Cullaloe. Meet in car park at 6.30pm

N.B. For ALL mothing events: (i) it is essential that you contact Tim on 01577 840317 to confirm times and that the event is going ahead; (ii) ensure suitable footwear and bring a torch.

Events Updates and Latest News

Be sure to regularly check our web site (<http://www.swt-fife.org.uk/>) and Facebook pages (<https://www.facebook.com/swtfifeandkinrossmc>) for news and important changes and updates to the programme.

Wild Things - New Programme

Wild Things Wildlife Watch group will start its next year's programme on Saturday 5th September, meeting at the Glass Class in St Andrews Botanic Garden, 10.30 am – 12.30pm. This session we are changing things a little. We will still meet once a month through the school year, on the first Saturday (except April) and the cost (to cover materials) remains at £1.50 per session. But this year we are aiming to help with some real conservation projects in the

St Andrews and East Fife area, and learn how to do wild-life surveys and gather useful data, as well as do some old favourite activities such as our rock pool guddle and picnic in June. Older children who might enjoy this kind of outdoor conservation activity are most welcome to join the group. Children age 7-16 are welcome, with activities for all ages. If you can't make every meeting, drop in to the ones you can! Please contact Deborah deborahcot-tam@gmail.com for further details.

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