

# Fife and Kinross Group



## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 108 Spring 2020



### Message from Alison Irvine, Chair



What a great success our new format AGM was which, although it was months ago now, I have not yet had the opportunity of writing about. A Sunday morning in late October might not have naturally seemed the best time for an AGM but, thanks to the foresight of Linda and Stewart on the committee, the combination of meeting and family friendly activities at Lochore Meadows Country Park attracted a good turn out and was very enjoyable. I'm sure we will be building on this format for 2020's AGM.

Over the winter Paul has continued to lead outings, often with a winter birding theme. Unfortunately, I have missed out on these but have had some very enjoyable wildlife sightings myself this winter. Tawny Owls seemed to be particularly active in our area in December and January, and as I walk the dog around 7.30am most mornings when it is still quite dark, I have got to know where the active clusters of owls are. I have tried hooting back to them but they are not fooled! I was also lucky enough to spot a Barn Owl while driving home one evening, although I always worry about them at

roadsides as their slow, low hunting technique makes them very vulnerable to road accidents. The mild weather in early winter seemed to totally reduce the number of birds coming to my feeders and the sunflower hearts were much slower than usual to go down. Although I still had visiting goldfinches, chaffinches and others, they didn't seem to be needing nearly as much supplementary food as usual.

One thing I must bring to your attention is a change in our local group website. For over 20 years we have had our own website, ably looked after by Bruce Borrows. However, with changes in the data protection legislation and improvements in the flexibility of the main SWT website, we have decided to close our own website and change to having our local group information hosted within the main SWT site. You will still be able to easily access copies of FAWN and all the information about our local events and activities. Incidentally, if you have access to e-mail and would like to receive electronic notification and reminders of our events, then you must access the main SWT website and register to receive updates. Within that you have the option of ticking only local information so you are not bombarded with every message from SWT. Or of course, you may want to keep up to date with what your Trust is doing at a national as well as a local level!

This is my final year as Chair of the local group, and I am aiming to get to as many of our reserves as possible, so I am looking forward to the rain stopping and getting out and about this spring and summer. Hopefully you will too and enjoy the wonderful wildlife which Fife and Kinross has to offer.



**Robertson is delighted to sponsor the Scottish Wildlife Trust.**

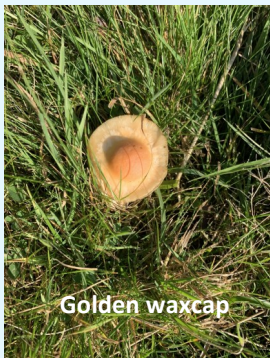
As an infrastructure, support services and construction company we realise how important the protection of biodiversity sites is and continually monitor and update our Environmental Policy to reflect this. Our on-site monitoring ensures that we will never knowingly damage or disrupt areas of natural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

## AUTUMN/WINTER OUTINGS

### Paul Blackburn

Following the AGM at Lochore Meadows our newly elected committee member Richard Smith, a former ranger at Lochore, led a fungal foray. Our first sighting was of common ink cap. This is one of the few fungi to have a long-established common name. Many English names for fungi were given in the 1990's in an attempt to make fungi more accessible to amateur naturalists. This mushroom, although not poisonous has nasty side effects if combined with alcohol with similar effects to the drugs used in the treatment of alcoholics. Next was a clump of candlesnuff growing on a dead stump. As the old name suggests it resembles melted candle wax. We walked round to the ancient grassland of the Clune, passing a plantation of Ash killed by Ash-dieback which Richard remembered planting in the 1980's

On the Clune were several species of brightly coloured waxcaps. These are good indicators of ancient, grassland which has never been ploughed or fertilised. The bright caps are enhanced by their waterproof skin which reflect sunlight. Their latin name, Hygrocybe, means "water-cap" and they are cool and damp to touch. We found Parrot waxcap (yellow), Golden waxcap (very yellow), Blackening waxcap (yellow turning black), Scarlet waxcap, Meadow waxcap and a fairy ring of either Snowy or Ivory waxcaps. .



Golden waxcap

We marvelled that the landscape had survived the intensive mining activity of the last 150 years. Two Whooper Swans flew along the north shore of the loch heralding the onset of winter.

Rough breakers greeted our outing to Seafield Tower at the end of November with spray crashing over the old sea wall. Sadly no sea-duck were to be seen but we had close up views of Turnstone and Purple Sandpiper feeding on the rocky shore. Sadly there was much disturbance of the waders from dogs. We also had good views of Rock Pipit and eventually managed to locate a Red-throated Diver. A Kestrel hovered over the path, a rare sight for me these days.

Our final outing of the year was to St Andrews at the start of December. An initial glimpse of the sea suggested there was little about but with telescopes up the large raft of a thousand or so Common Scoter was soon located offshore. Amongst these were a few Long Tailed Duck and Velvet Scoter, most easily identified by their white wing bars. At one end of the raft a group of Scaup were found. Skeins of geese flew across St Andrews Bay.



Long Tailed Duck

On the nearby rocks was a small party of Turnstone with three Knot. In isolation the fine detail of the Knot's grey plumage could be admired in contrast to the more usual sighting of them in massed flocks. As we walked to the Castle Rocks we stopped to watch a flock of Long-Tailed Tits working their way along the mature trees lining the Scores. Then two Peregrine Falcons were seen perched on a tower and they remained there just long enough to get good views through the telescopes.



Peregrine on chapel tower

We didn't see any Purple Sandpiper on the Castle Rocks but did get a good view of a Greenshank.

One final surprise awaited us on our return to the Bruce embankment Car Park as a female Black Redstart flitted about the tide-wrack and occasionally vanished under a parked car. There are few annual records of these in Fife so this was a red-letter sighting.

If you have any suggestions for future outings, particularly in SW Fife please let me know.

## CONTACTS

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## **Birding for Beginners and Improvers**

### **Birding Lochore Meadows**

As one of the activities for the recent group AGM we held a birding walk along the loch shore. It was a beautiful sunny morning meaning that the birds we saw were looking their best! We got very good views of several buzzards gliding low overhead, the autumn light allowing us to see the beautiful markings on wings and tail. Lochore is known among birders for winter waterfowl including the occasional rarer species. Nothing unusual showed on this occasion, but we had a good look at the more regular ducks, their key features to note, and how to spot something different if it crops up! We had some lovely views of little grebes, and there were plenty of small woodland birds in the trees too. A very pleasant way to spend a Sunday morning!

### **Beginners Birding at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs**

On December 15<sup>th</sup> the Beginners and Improvers Birding Group met at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs LNR. This site, formed of former gravel pits, offers a variety of habitats and bird species with a circular path around. We started off at the south-west corner of Gaddon Loch, which held plenty of widgeon, goldeneye, tufted duck, goosander and mallard. Mute swans came looking for food, as did a flock of coal and great tits. In the alders along the path a mixed flock of siskin, goldfinch and a few redpoll gave us a challenge; their constant fast movement as they fed made trying to see them in the binoculars quite difficult. We checked the pine and spruce trees near the road for goldcrest – again not making life easy for us with constant movement! Robins were more obliging – used to being fed by visitors, they came close. Almost back at the car park again we had our best luck of the morning – a water rail out in the open on a patch of mud beside the path giving a rare sighting of this elusive species. The thirty-third species of the morning and a very nice bird to round off our 2019 outings.

## **RESERVES ROUNDUP**

### **Dumbarnie Links**

Having highlighted the issue of the lack of water in the dune slacks of the reserve in May I am pleased to report that with the onset of wet weather in the autumn there has been water lying in the slacks since early November. With completion of construction of the Golf Course peace returned to the Reserve and the adjacent SSSI and we have seen the return of wading birds to the immediate vicinity.

Although outwith the Reserve it is worthy of note that a small lochan which appeared as an unintended consequence of Golf Course construction to the immediate north-east of the reserve hosted a pair of Shellduck that successfully reared ten chicks. Whilst Shellduck have been seen on the reserve in the past they have never bred.

*David Jenkins*

### **Carlingnose**

It is very much the quiet season for Carlingnose. The reserve is there because of its botanical importance so we await the appearance of the plants when the temperature increases and the days lengthen.

Meanwhile it becomes a good viewpoint for spotting some of the birds which spend the winter on or at the edge of the sea.. A recent walk along the coastal path yielded a small flock of black-headed gulls with just one red-breasted merganser and 2 goldeneyes with them. There were also 2 male eiders near the ruined pier. The pier is often used by grey herons as a roost site. Finally look out for little grebes close to the shore at Port Laing.

*John Done*

## **FIFE CORN BUNTING UPDATE!**

227 territories/singing males were recorded this year across the whole East Neuk of Fife compared with 164 in 2018. If we only look at the 13 farms that were both surveyed in 2018 and 2019, figures still look fantastic: 129 territories/singing males in 2019

vs. 95 in 2018 (increase by 36%)! The results suggest that the population is increasing but two different surveying methodologies were used and a shortage of surveyors resulted in less surveys/visits

### **Events Updates and Latest News**

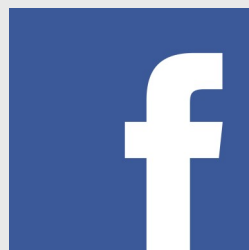
Be sure to regularly check our web site:

(<http://www.swt-fife.org.uk/>)

and Facebook pages

(<https://www.facebook.com/swtfifeandkinrossmc>)

for news and important changes and updates to the programme plus FAWN in colour!





## EVENTS SPRING/SUMMER 2020

Any suggestions? Able to lead a walk? Give a talk? Get in touch with Paul Blackburn on: 01382 542826; [secfifekinswt@btinternet.com](mailto:secfifekinswt@btinternet.com)



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

### Wednesday 18 March 2020 7.30 pm: Joint talk with Pitcairn Society

Louise Ramsay, Scottish Wild Beavers Group  
"Why Scotland needs Beavers".  
Collydean Community Centre, Glenrothes, Postcode KY7 6UL

### Thursday 26 March 2020 7.30 pm: Joint talk with Kinross Camera Club

Neil McIntyre, well-known bird photographer, will give an illustrated talk on his work.  
Kinross Church Centre, 64 High Street, Kinross, KY13 8AJ

### Wednesday 15 April 2020 7.30 pm: Joint talk with Pitcairn Society

Susan Falconer will give a talk on "Beasties and Bugs".  
Collydean Community Centre, Glenrothes, KY7 6UL 7.30 pm

### Thursday 23 April 7.00pm: Outing: Birdsong and Bats.

An evening walk in Riverside Park, Glenrothes for spring bird song and bats.  
Meet Riverside Park Car Park, Glenrothes NO 265 016

### Thursday 21 May 7pm: Outing: Bluebells and Birdsong

A short evening stroll into Balmerino woods.  
Meet Balmerino Abbey NO 358 245

### Saturday 30 May 10 am: Outing: Calcareous Grassland and Warblers.

An exploration of our reserve at Carlingnose Point which has an interesting range of habitats and plants.  
Meet at North Queensferry Railway Station KY11 1JE

### Thursday 25 June 7pm: Outing: Moorland Plants

Evening walk to look at the plants and landscape of the Lomond Hills. Plants found on previous visits have included: Mountain Pansies, Mountain Everlasting and Adders Tongue fern.  
Meet at Craigmead Car Park NO 227 061

### Saturday 27 June 10 am: Outing: Butterflies and Plants

An exploration of Auchtermuchty Common noted for plants and butterflies.  
Meet Auchtermuchty Common Car Park NO 236 135.

### Saturday 11 July 2 pm: Outing: Butterflies

A short walk and climb along the coastal path to the spectacular setting of Kinraig Head to look for Northern Brown Argos and other butterflies. If the weather is butterfly-unfriendly there should be lots of interesting plants as compensation. .

Meet at car park at entrance to Shell Bay NO 469 005

### Thursday 23 July 7 pm: Outing: Tayport Heath and Forest

Evening stroll to Tayport Heath and Tentsmuir Forest to look for the creeping ladies tresses orchids with the possibility of Osprey and Dolphin in Tayport Bay  
Meet North Links Road Car Park, Tayport NO 465 282

### MOTHING DATES FOR 2020

DATE	SWT. RESERVE/ MAP REF.	MEETING PLACE/ START TIME			
Fri 24 <sup>th</sup> April	Cullaloe Reservoir NT188877	Car Park 19.15 hrs	Fri 7 <sup>th</sup> August	Dumbarnie Links NO437025	Car Park 21.00 hrs
Fri 29 <sup>th</sup> May	Bankhead Moss NO447103	Car Park 20.45 hrs	Fri 21 <sup>st</sup> August	Cullaloe Reservoir NT188877	Car Park 20.15 hrs
Fri 26 <sup>th</sup> June	Dumbarnie Links NO437025	Car Park 21.30 hrs	Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> October	Bankhead Moss NO447103	Car Park 18.00 hrs
Fri 17 <sup>th</sup> July	Fleecefaulds NT188877	Car Park 21.30 hrs	Please telephone Tim Brain on 10577 840317 to confirm the events as they are weather related .		
			Please bring a torch and wear warm clothing and suitable footwear. Extra traps always welcome as long as you have a generator or they are battery powered.		
			If you get lost en route, Tim's mobile is 0756591331 (it is only used when away from home).		

