

Fife and Kinross Group



Fife Area Wildlife News

No 107 Winter 2019



Message from Alison Irvine, Chair



green areas in the park. Short-eared owls hunted amongst the grassy plantations and up to 400 wigeon ducks fed on the short grass fields.

At that time Scottish Wildlife Trust were instrumental in advising Fife Regional Council, as it was then, on the mix of tree species which should be planted in the different areas of the park. Our working relationship with the local authority has continued to this day. SWT sits on the Fife Biodiversity Partnership, and Eden Estuary Local Nature Reserve advisory group and recently I have attended the steering group which is guiding the work of Kirsty Orr as she reviews the Listed Wildlife Sites in Fife and which she has already written about in FAWN. At this time of huge, continuing cut backs in local authority budgets I think we are extremely lucky in Fife that we still have employees of the Council whose job it is to protect and develop wildlife habitats and protect species. At the wildlife sites meetings we have discussed how volunteers can do huge amounts of work for conservation but still need an input from the local authority to provide support such as inputting data and mapping for Fife Nature, meeting space and computer systems for listed wildlife sites. Fife Council is regularly at the forefront of work for conservation and I think it is appropriate to use this column to record our appreciation of this work and to hope that it will continue uninterrupted into the future.

By the time you read this we will have held our AGM at Lochore Meadows Country Park. This was an experimental departure from our usual format and I hope to have seen many of you there. This new venue is of particular significance for me as I started my working career as a ranger at Lochore Meadows. At that time the park was still developing and most of the trees and woodlands were only about a meter high. You could see from one end to the other of the park without a forest blocking your view – changed days now when so many of the hundreds of thousands of trees which were planted are now nearly full grown specimens. In the early days the park was a great habitat for many open grassland species such as grey partridge – I remember, having made a giant snowman outside the park centre one winter, we were then able to watch a covey of partridge feeding on the grass we had exposed – the only



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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.

RESERVES ROUNDUP

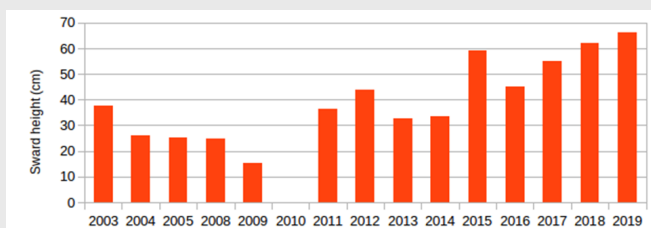
Lielowan

This year's site condition monitoring of Lielowan Meadow was held on the 29th June, and I'd like to thank every one who took part. If you haven't been involved in annual site condition monitoring before I'd thoroughly recommend joining in as it is a very practical, hands on, way of getting to know the reserves, as well as making a valuable contribution to their future management. The process involves selecting at random 20 one meter squares and checking off what is in each square against a standard list of favourable and unfavourable species, as well as some physical characteristics. By looking for changes from year to year the condition of the site and the effect of management can be monitored.

For those not familiar with the reserve, Lielowan is a small strip of unimproved grassland adjoining the B914, in the south east corner of Fife, and is split into two distinct strips: drier neutral grassland sloping down from the road, and a wetter strip of rush pasture / fen at the bottom of the slope, dominated by sharp flowered rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) and brown sedge (*Carex disticha*). Notable species include salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and pale sedge (*Carex pallescens*). The monitoring is focused on the drier grassland (classified as MG5a).

Having completed the survey we explored the marshy part of the reserve, although it was unusually dry under foot. As we progressed I came across a very beautiful, and rather puzzling pure white orchid. After some discussion of what it might be we tried using an identification key (which included such intriguing characteristics as 'smells of tom cats at night!') but arrived at an obviously wrong conclusion. We had a suspicion that it was a nonpigmented form of a more common species. Subsequently examining photos taken, it was confirmed as a colourless form of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (common spotted orchid). Although it would have been exciting to have found a new addition to the reserve it was still a pleasure to enjoy the beauty of this little plant!

One characteristic of the reserve, which has become increasingly apparent over the years, is the abundant growth of the vegetation over the summer, even though the site is thoroughly grazed in the winter and spring. I thought it would be instructive to look back at the average height (in cm) of the vegetation recorded from previous years monitoring (I couldn't find a record for 2010 though) and plotted the results.



There is a clear indication of a recent upward trend. This is of concern because the more competitive species are becoming more dominant, leading to a decline in diversity. Just north of the reserve is an old abandoned limestone quarry and one possibility to explain the increasing fertility could be that lime rich water is seeping down into the reserve. Recently Rory has commissioned soil sample tests for Lielowan, Fleecefaulds and Bomains. The results however showed that, surprisingly, the level of calcium (lime) at Lielowan is not much higher than at the other two reserves, but that the level of sodium in the soil is about four times higher! Is this high sodium level due to run off of winter salt from the road, and is it somehow boosting the fertility? These are

difficult questions to answer and make it harder to plan the future management of the reserve to tackle this problem. Thankfully the *Sanguisorba* seems to be holding its own against this increasing competition.

The old quarry is however the source of one recent problem related to the fact that the flooded workings are a magnet for cave divers. The land owner, due to safety and liability issues, has recently fenced off the parking space at the entrance to the quarry to discourage the divers. Unfortunately this parking space is the only moderately safe one from which to access the reserve. I understand that legally we have a right of access to park there but getting a final legal ruling in these cases can take years. In the mean time, if you would like to visit Lielowan I would advise that you contact either Rory or myself (alan.harvey2@tiscali.co.uk) for advice on parking options.

Alan Harvey

Carlingnose

It appears to have been a good year for the plants at Carlingnose. Some dropwort was showing well on the monitoring day in July and there was more in the field at the north end of the village.

Other plants, including lesser meadow- rue, kidney vetch and bloody cranesbill have appeared and there are now field gentians (see photo) flowering by the rocky knoll. Devilsbit scabious is also showing well. A single plant of moonwort was the prize find on the monitoring day. Just off the reserve at the start of the Pilgrims way is a patch of wild carrot.



The common terns did have a look at the ruined pier. There were at least 30 perched on it one day in July but they didn't stay long. The noise from Long Craig under the old road bridge suggests they used this rocky island again this year. Bird sightings on and near to the reserve have included a yellow hammer on the reserve and several fulmar pairs on the quarry face above Deep Sea World.

John Done

Kilminning

The periodic visits by Flying Flock are having a colourful visual effect on the reserve during spring and summer. The ideal grazing time for the sheep is from end of September to February, after seeding and before the flowers bloom. They have chomped their way through a significant amount of rank grasses allowing Bulbous Buttercups and Primroses to flourish in March and April, Wild Hyacinths in May and Birds-foot-trefoil, Meadow Vetchling, Lady's Bedstraw and Common Knapweed later in the season. Cat's-ear growth is increasing, including in areas to the west of the 'castle' which previously was almost totally green. It is interesting to note that Agrimony is spreading to other locations of the reserve from the single site recorded previously. Northern Marsh orchids add a colourful touch in June.

There remains, however, a significant amount of litter (dead grasses) which continues to be a management issue.

Elizabeth Gray

SUMMER/AUTUMN OUTINGS

We had an extra outing in July thanks to an offer from Trevor Harris, of St Andrews Links, to give us a tour of the Castle course. Unfortunately thanks to the recent heat wave the orchids had all finished flowering but it was still a fascinating experience. Until 2005 the land was arable and rough grazing. Initially the course was rabbit-fenced. The fairways and a 10m band of "rough" are managed for golfers but the rest of the land is left to its devices / managed for wildlife with a diverse mix of grassland. The architect had plans for a "babbling brook" but there was insufficient water so some interesting wet grassland areas developed instead. Existing field drains drain the course. A reed bed established in 2013 has grown too much due to high nutrient levels in the water flowing in from the arable land above, so there is no open water left. This area is good for Reed Bunting, frogs and toads.

There is a resident Kestrel, thanks to the nest box provided, and this year 5 young were raised from the nest. Apparently the secret of a successful Kestrel box is not to clean it out too thoroughly at the end of the season as Kestrels like to see evidence of previous use. Yellowhammers were still singing.



Although the orchids had finished flowering the remains of their flower spikes could be seen, with several hundred spikes of both Common Spotted and Northern Marsh orchid. Like any grassland management the encroachment of tree seedlings is a continuous challenge.

A hot day gave ideal conditions for our outing to the dunes at Kinshaldy to look for Grayling. This coincided with a Butterfly Conservation outing with the same objective. The car park was very busy, but our new local group banner was used for the first time to advertise our presence. The dunes adjoining the car park had colourful clumps of Harebell and carpets of Thyme and Eyebright in flower. The dunes south of the Kinshaldy burn were less colourful, but lots of Blue Fleabane were coming to the end of their flowering period. The outlet of the Kinshaldy Burn is a fascinating area with Alder fringing the burn, and clumps of reed bed developing. Between the alder and the reeds a small clump of grass of Parnassus was in flower.

We walked south through the dune system until we came to an open sandy area at the junction of paths. Here we found our first Grayling, which are only found at Tentsmuir in Fife. Typically they like these open areas of bare ground but currently the rabbit population is low due to a number of diseases so the dunes are more overgrown than they used to be. A quick scan of the sea revealed a Red Throated Diver, and Gannets and Sandwich Tern were also offshore.

A group of colourful Shield bugs were found on a defoliated Ragwort. We walked across the dune system to the forest edge and then onto the top of a large sandhill, just within the Eden LNR (and above a WWII pillbox) which gave extensive views over the sand dunes. In this area we saw several Common Blue butterflies, and another Grayling. Painted Ladies were still evident on the thistle. We walked back along the forest edge, passing a patch of purple-red mushrooms (Russula sp).

Back at the burn we found some Common Darter dragonflies (see photo)



We saw 9 species of butterfly - besides Grayling, Painted Lady and Common Blue - Peacock, Small Copper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Green-veined White.

Our evening outing to the waterfront at Newburgh was rather quiet. The extensive reedbeds on Mugdrum island had purple-tinged seed heads. A large flock of Common gull sat on one of the sandbanks and Herons stood at the edge of the reed beds. A skein of Canada Geese flew downstream, and drifts of Swallows flew over the far side of the reed beds. On the hillside the outline of the Newburgh bear, etched into the grass, could just be seen. A brown moth on the path was a Large Yellow underwing. People gradually drifted away. As the final group walked back up through the park we put a 'scope up for a final scan over Mugdrum island and watched a Fallow deer grazing on an embankment.

Paul Blackburn

Events Updates and Latest News

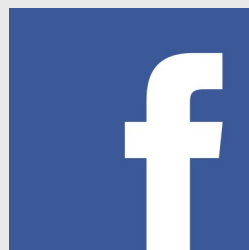
Be sure to regularly check our web site:

(<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 WINTER 2019/20

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



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

Wednesday 13th November 7.30 pm: Talk

The Brazilian Rain Forest

Professor Thomas Meagher, St Andrews University

Cupar Baptist Church, 79 Bonnygate, Cupar, KY15 4BY

Sunday 24 November 10am: Outing - Seafield Tower, Kirkcaldy

A walk along the coastal path to look at the high-tide wader roost. Possible Purple Sandpiper and Kingfisher.

Meet at the Car Park at Grid Ref NO 281 898, KY1 1SJ

Saturday 7 December 10 am: Outing - St Andrews

Take a break from Christmas Shopping to get a close up view of the offshore sea-duck and the waders on the rocky coast. Bring binoculars but telescopes will be available.

Meet Bruce Embankment Car Park, near the golf museum, KY16 9AB

Saturday 8 February 2020 10 am: Outing - Birnie Loch

A short winter walk around Birnie and Gaddon Loch with a focus on identification of trees in winter and wildfowl.

Meet at Birnie Loch Car Park , Grid Reference NO283125

Monday 10th February 2020 7.30 pm: Talk

Learning to Love Urban Gulls

Will Cresswell, St Andrews University

Meet Cupar Baptist Church, 79 Bonnygate, Cupar KY15 4BY

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.

Meet Kinross Church Centre, 64 High Street, Kinross, KY13 8AJ

Birding for Beginners and Improvers

The Beginner and Improvers Birding Group is still going strong and at the time of writing we're ready to start a new season of outings (running roughly once a month from September to June). The idea is to have a pleasant walk, find as many birds as possible and learn a bit about them. Often we get distracted by plants, animals and butterflies, including, on one occasion, dolphins. Last season we found a nice range of birds including a snow bunting, a reward for being on the West Sands in February fog! We also had a trip to the Isle of May, where we saw a cuckoo and the arctic terns were a bit up close and personal (see photo)!

Please contact Deborah (deborahcottam@gmail.com) for more details and if you would like to come along one weekend for a try out – binoculars can be loaned if you don't have any. I also post updates on our Facebook page, SWT Fife and Kinross Group, including news of the next outing.



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