

Fife and Kinross Group



Fife Area Wildlife News

No 111 Spring 2021



Message from Stewart Collier, Chair



Following in the footsteps of many enlightened and committed members I was honoured to be voted Group Chair at the 2020 AGM. I am fortunate to have a knowledgeable and active committee but empty seats and no Group Secretary does increase the work load. This results in us having to prioritise and we may not be as quick in responding to queries as we would like. I hope that some members feel able to contribute and

join the committee. If anyone is interested please contact me by email: chairfifekinswt@gmail.com.

I hope many of you have enjoyed the Trust's regular and varied webinar talks. The idea for these talks came from the Fife and Kinross Group Committee, the suggestion being very well received by Trust managers and proving to be a great success.

We have field trips planned but obviously these are dependent on changing circumstances and will be on the Group's web page: <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-group/fife-and-kinross/> Details of a joint presentation with Kinross Camera Club by Moira Gardner on 25th March 2021 via Zoom will also be on the Group's web page.

Unfortunately under 50% of our members have elected to receive email updates from the Trust. Can I respectfully suggest that members not getting Trust emails are missing out and should change their preferences at:

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/how-to-help/become-a-member/update-your-address/>

Introduction

In my early teens I became more interested in wildlife and soon after its formation joined a local naturalists society. As a long standing member of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust I have held volunteer roles as reserve warden and administrator. I have also been Chair of the Yorkshire Mammal Group, President of York Photographic Society and a committee member of the Yorkshire Naturalists Union. The Yorkshire Mammal Group is

active in mammal research and I have worked on the following local and national species surveys: Wood Mice, Voles, Shrews, Bats, Harvest Mice, Hazel Dormice, Badgers, Otters, and Pine Martens. Spending a week helping to trap and radio collar the latter during a cold Fort Augustus January. I also have a keen interest in weasels.

Watching Wildlife

As we look forward in the hope of a more accessible year, can I sow a seed or two for those lucky enough to have gardens: 1. Consider creating a small meadow in your lawn; 2. Make a bug house.

When relocating to Fife in January 2015 we had already decided to create a wildlife garden and several wild plants from our garden were potted up ready for the move. In spring 2019 I started to create a meadow in the lawn by leaving about a third of the grass uncut. I was advised to cut the "meadow" by hand in early September as a strimmer would harm any wildlife taking refuge in the long grass. While using a hand sickle to cut down the grass I "rescued" 7 frogs (we don't have a pond) before setting the mower to its lowest cut and scalping the area. Raking the area I pulled many grass sods out to expose bare soil for sowing *Rhinanthus minor* – Yellow Rattle.

[Yellow rattle is an annual root-hemiparasite that parasitizes the roots of a wide range of meadow plants especially grasses and whilst capable of carrying out its own photosynthesis it is dependent upon these hosts for additional supplies of carbohydrates and minerals. By drawing nutrients from surrounding vegetation it impedes their growth and helps maintain an open sward structure.]

Last year the Yellow Rattle looked great, stunting the grass and allowing flowering plants to appear. As 2020 was a poor year for Yellow Rattle setting seed, demand quickly exceeded supply. If you intend creating your own meadow I would suggest you order seed early and check its provenance. Most wild plant seeds benefit from a September sowing and being exposed to the elements.

Take care and I look forward to meeting some of you at future events.



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.

Gardens of Delights? By Richard Smith

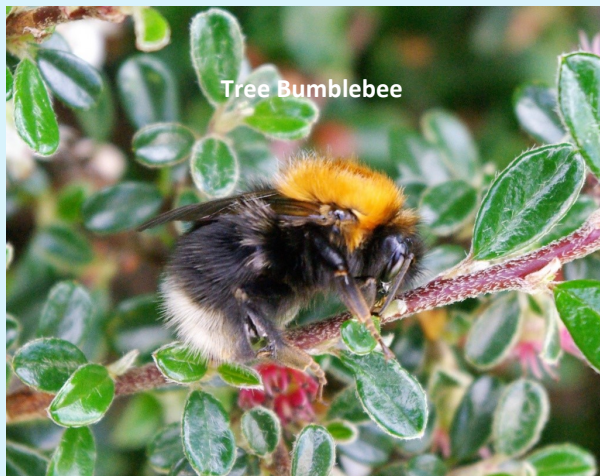
Following Paul's illuminating article about his mini grassland reserve in last FAWN I thought I would reinforce how important gardens are for both wildlife and for us who seek it.

A real inspiration for all of us must be Jennifer Owen who, for over thirty years, recorded all the species in her Leicestershire garden. In that time, she recorded over 2500 species of plant and animal, several of which were new to Britain and six which were new to science. Scarily, I think a lot of our gardens could be like that if we only had the time to look and the skill to know?

I've had a very limited stab, (especially when identifying invertebrates!!) in my own garden, which is semi-rural with a pond and very small wild patch. I'm a regular bird feeder throughout the year.

So, so far since 2010 I've been lucky enough to observe fifty-three species of bird in the garden with House Sparrow at the top of the list and Buzzard and Mallard at the bottom with only one record of each. Surprisingly, Yellowhammer, Brambling and Bullfinch are encountered more often than Song Thrush or Pied Wagtail.

Comma, Small Copper and Ringlet have been the highlights of the twelve butterfly species seen. Additionally, there have been ten different mammals, including resident Soprano Pipistrelle Bats; three species of Odonata; one-hundred and thirty-nine moth species, including Birch Mocha, four amphibians and a minimum of five bee species. I know that the bees have been under recorded as I'm increasingly timorous of their ID and really need to spend more time on that. Although my first record of a Fife Tree Bumblebee was from the Cotoneaster in the garden.



I've neglected the plants and bryophytes but do intend to remedy that – sometime? However, if you glance at the BSBI Atlas for Dodder:

<https://bsbi.org/maps?taxonid=2cd4p9h.yvx>

the wee dot in West Fife is from my back garden, amongst some Michaelmas Daisy! So, you never know what's lurking amongst the garden gnomes?



There are the usual fungi to be found in the grass, such as Parrot and Meadow Waxcaps, but they are all rather ephemeral and can be easily missed but a first for me this autumn were the Bird Nest Fungi discovered while cutting back some sedums.



I'm certain that other gardens will be much more diverse for wildlife but hopefully all gardens will be places of wonder and discovery as long as we don't monoblock them over?

Bankhead Moss - Call for Volunteers

Jean Stewart's article in the last issue (FAWN 110) stressed the ongoing problem of the widespread presence of self-seeded birch which, if allowed to mature, would lead to water loss and the drying out of the precious raised bog habitat. This is a renewed plea for able-bodied volunteers to help with the management of this wonderful site. Raised bogs are a rare habitat in Eastern Scotland and we have a responsibility to try to maintain the site. **Please contact Jean through the secretary or on 01334 475763 if you would like to volunteer.**



Group Secretary

The Fife and Kinross Group are currently seeking a Secretary to join our active committee. The role is primarily administrative to support the Chair and committee by organising the agenda for meetings, taking minutes and ensuring

all relevant information is circulated and action points are followed up. The Group has a generic gmail account that the Secretary will manage, dealing with queries from members, organisations and the public. This is an important role that allows the individual to use their skills with the support of a knowledgeable team. **If interested please contact the Chair: Stewart Collier by e-mail chairfifekinswt@gmail.com**

Kilminning – Turning Tarmac into Wetland *By Will Cresswell*

It was all too easy to feel a bit depressed at the start of last year – David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg both reminding us in great detail about the biodiversity and climate emergency – and then came the pandemic. We all need some good news, and a little sliver of hope.

Last year the community in Crail, after getting organized during a two-year long public consultation process (a charrette) to identify its priorities for the future, made a number of successful Community Land Asset Transfer applications to Fife Council. The charrette process identified an overwhelming priority amongst the Crail community to maintain and enhance the natural environment within and outside the town for wildlife as well as people. As a result, the Crail Community Partnership was formed, to work for these environmental improvements. Then lockdown happened and most of our plans had to be out on hold. But there was also an opportunity. We used the time to put together the case for transfer of ownership of council land around Crail back to the community. The core of our argument for this was there was a clear mandate from the charrette for adding wildlife habitat to the town and the need for local ownership in perpetuity to allow this to happen. Perhaps lockdown helped, where more of us realized the value of community wildlife spaces, or where the Council realized that they could not afford to look after, let alone improve, the areas we asked for. In any case, we were successful, and three areas of amenity grassland were returned to the Crail community. One of these areas is Kilminning – part of it already leased to the SWT as a nature reserve, and part of it a brownfield site. We secured the existing nature reserve's future forever, but also more land to enlarge and improve it.

Kilminning is located on the coastal path between Crail and Fife Ness. The coastal strip is the existing SWT reserve. The reserve will stay under SWT management, and the existing lease with Fife Council is simply being transferred to the Crail Community Partnership. The reserve is an area of grassland managed by sheep grazing, with consequent interesting plant diversity. The area above it, however, is largely covered by tarmac left over from its use as an airfield. But trees and shrubs have begun to take over, making Kilminning a magnet for migrant birds, as one of the only bits of wooded habitat on Fife Ness. The site is well known to birders and gets scarce migrants regularly such as red-backed shrike, barred warbler, greenish warbler, red-breasted flycatchers and rosefinch. It occasionally gets spectacular rarities like the long staying eastern olivaceous warbler a few years ago and the Siberian thrush last autumn. Despite its tarmac, it is a good site. But there is a clear opportunity to make it even better. To turn this brownfield site into a proper wildlife habitat.

We plan to create a much more interesting and biodiverse space for nature and for people. We plan to remove much of the tarmac (although leaving enough for access and parking) to create space for more trees, for water and so for more wildlife. We plan to greatly increase the tree and shrub cover, and to connect Kilminning to other sites around Crail via a network of wooded paths. Over the next thirty years we want to have Kilminning as part of a network of wildlife sites so that a person could walk all day around Crail in biodiverse, beautiful habitat. And of course, this will all make the area better for migrant and resident birds.

Addition of wetland habitat to the East Neuk, where there is none at all, would greatly increase the attraction of the area to birds. There is a fast flowing burn that exits from under the tarmac to flow through a concrete channel through the coastal reserve: we can fully uncover this water source and rewild its flow to create a wetland. A flooded meadow certainly, but possibly also a lochan.





Although we have already obtained ownership of the site from Fife Council for £1 (subject to final legal completion in February), we need to pay the legal fees for Kilminning (land transfers might be cheap but lawyers are not). We need to do some prompt infrastructure work to manage access to prevent off road driving and fly tipping. We need to consult (and pay!) professionals who can advise us about the hydrology of the site and the engineering needed to remove the tarmac and to create a loch and flooded meadow instead. We need to do surveys to determine what other wildlife is on the site. To these ends we carried out some crowd funding in November and December last year and raised over £10,000 from over 100 donors to the project.

This year, we can now begin to create a full plan for Kilminning and start a second round of fund raising to make the habitat improvements. This may be as simple as breaking up the tarmac and planting trees, or as complicated as diverting and damming the existing burn that runs through the site to create a loch and other wetland habitats. Whatever the exact outcome, we will end up with a rewilded site, better for wildlife and people. And a much better nature reserve, secure forever in community ownership against future development.

Will Cresswell (Kilminning is my local patch) on behalf of Crail Community Partnership. If you would like to get involved please email me at wrlc@st-and.ac.uk

Photo credits: Will Cresswell

[Editor's note: Unfortunately, detail in the before and after aerial views above cannot be seen clearly in grayscale. Please view the colour version of FAWN 111 on the group's web page on the main Scottish Wildlife Trust website]

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!



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