

# Fife and Kinross Group



## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 112 Summer 2021



### Message from Stewart Collier, Chair



I hope that you are all able to get out and about to enjoy and learn from wildlife. The Group has arranged monthly field trips that will be available for members up to our October AGM. Obviously they are subject to restrictions and in order to comply with regulations all bookings will be via the Trust's website events page and EventBrite. This does make it

impossible for anyone without access to the web to register for these events but a close relative or friend with internet will be able to make the reservation. The system has the advantage that should the meeting have to be cancelled all attendees will be notified by email.

I am pleased to report that following the request for a Group Secretary, at our last committee meeting Louise Crane was co-opted into the office, we were also fortunate to have Andrew Wilson join us.

Most of you will have been spending far more time outdoors in gardens, tending potted plants or window boxes. My wife and I have been busy sowing seeds of native flowering plants from Scotia Seeds. If you are considering purchasing native plants please take an identification book with you to double check if they are growing naturally in Fife and Kinross. I have seen "cowslip" plants for sale that on inspection were not cowslips and Piri-Piri-Burr plants being sold as wild flower plants. The latter are an invasive plant from Australia and should be avoided.

If growing your own seeds or plants it is worth emailing the garden centre in advance to see if any peat free compost is available or been used to raise plants before purchasing. Consideration should also be given to the fact that neonicotinoids are used on many commercially available garden plants. As this can remain active in plants for up to 3 years it is worthwhile checking this out. If we make providers aware we can make changes!

### Some facts about neonicotinoids

- Neonicotinoids are active substances used in plant protection products to control harmful insects, which means they are insecticides.
- The name literally means "new nicotine-like insecticides". They are chemically similar to nicotine.

- The name neonicotinoids is sometimes shortened to "neonics" or "NNIs".
- The first neonic was approved in the EU in 2005.
- Neonics are systemic pesticides. Unlike contact pesticides, which remain on the surface of the treated parts of plants (e.g. leaves), systemic pesticides are taken up by the plant and transported throughout the plant (leaves, flowers, roots and stems, as well as pollen and nectar).
- Neonics are much more toxic to invertebrates, like insects, than they are to mammals, birds and other higher organisms.
- Neonics affect the central nervous system of insects, leading to eventual paralysis and death.

### Why use peat-free growing media

Peat is primarily sourced from lowland raised bogs – an increasingly rare habitat in the UK and across Europe. For several years the need to conserve this diminishing natural resource has been recognised, as well as the flora and fauna that depend on it. Peat bogs are also an important carbon sink, destroying them to make garden compost contributes to climate change.

As water is important for wildlife an inexpensive bird-bath can easily be provided and could become a focal point. Our large plastic plant saucer cost under £4.00 and is used by birds, insects and mammals (see photograph).



As citizen science is becoming more important can I suggest that all you see is recorded on either:

iRecord - <https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/>

Fife Nature Records Centre - <http://www.fife.gov.uk/fifenature>

I hope to see some of you at a field meeting.

## RESERVES ROUNDUP

### Barnyards Marsh - New Volunteers

Albert Lawrie until very recently was the volunteer who oversaw Barnyards Marsh. He is a great photographer and spent many happy hours quietly in the marsh photographing damselflies and the stunning marsh orchids. Last year Ken Weir and I offered to take Albert's place on his retirement. Ken and I were volunteers with the Beautiful Kilconquhar group which raised funds to extend the board-walk. We both live in cottages that look over the marsh and we have lovely views across the sedge grasses towards the church. There has been a great show of snowdrops and daffodils around the fringes of the east side of the marsh. Fortunately the paths are reasonably clear although before June, when the marsh orchids come out, they will need to be carefully cut. I'm not good at recognising birds but think there was a heron sitting on the bank of the drainage ditch looking hopefully in the water a few weeks ago. Barnyards Marsh is a quiet restful spot and there is a good view to be had from the bench on the board-walk section on the south side of the marsh. Please do come and visit us, June for the orchids, and August time for the intoxicating scent of Meadowsweet.

### *Elizabeth Bracher*

### Cullaloe

Things are definitely changing on Cullaloe as the seasons progress. Our recently reinstated bird feeders at the pine trees are attracting a wide variety of birds, from tits, to finches, such as Chaffinch and Siskin and the area is always a hub of activity. It's always good to stand at the viewing screen, listening to the birds in the pine, while looking out over the reservoir. On the subject of the reservoir, we're pleased to report that our resident swans have hatched six cygnets this year and our Mallards have also had success. At the time of writing, the Coots and Little Grebe are still on nests, but we're confident they'll be as successful. Due to the cold start to spring, things have been appearing a bit later than normal, but we've now got a healthy complement of warblers that have arrived from the African continent. The willow scrub is alive with the sound of Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff, and the rushes and sedges ring out with the scratchy sounds of the Sedge Warbler.

One of the positives that has come out of the pandemic is the renewed interest in nature and the

outdoors that people have experienced, and the understanding of how uplifting it can be to spend time in and engage with nature. As a result, we're seeing more visitors to the reserve than we have in the past, and it's really good to see people taking advantage of what the reserve has to offer. Sadly, the pandemic has also created a problem with fly tipping, both on the reserve and in the neighbouring areas. As a result, the difficult decision was taken to close and lock the gate down to the main car park, to prevent the reserve being used as a dumping ground for the unscrupulous. The disabled parking layby remains open, however, and there is space for 2-3 cars there, so visitors can still safely access the reserve.

### *Grahame Boath*

### Lielowan Meadow

Probably the major development at Lielowan meadow over the last year has been the installation, in October, of a new fence around the reserve (paid for by the insurance of the drivers who demolished the old fence!). This means it is now possible to catch up on grazing, which was not possible for a significant part of last year. It will be interesting to see the effect on sward height, which has been steadily increasing over the years, when we come to do the annual botanical survey in June. I am also hopeful that the Salad Burnet will put on a good show again. In March this year I completed a litter pick and managed to fill four large sacks. It is unfortunate that Lielowan borders a long stretch of road, and slopes downward from the verge, so that there is a continual 'seepage' of litter from passing cars. This trip also reminded me that access to Lielowan remains difficult as there is still no safe parking nearby and the walk down the side of the road to the reserve entrance is not a pleasant experience. As much as I would like to encourage members to visit the reserve, from a safety point of view I cannot recommend it at the moment. I believe there has been some discussion of the possibility of accessing the site from the industrial estate situated a few hundred metres to the south, and this would be a great improvement if it could be arranged.



### *Alan Harvey.*

## Dumbarnie Links

The Coastal Path running through Dumbarnie has seen an increase in traffic since the onset of COVID related restrictions but this has not been associated with major problems of littering, most people being happy to leave the place as they found it. However the few campers have had fires the sites of which will take time to heal. A clean-out of the pill boxes in November was organised by Deidre Munro from the Coastal Path, no evidence of roosting bats was found in the southern pillbox adapted as a battery, but hibernating butterflies were seen. There seems to be a new habit of leaving pet memorials in the Reserve, why the plastic wrapping cannot be removed from flowers is unclear to me.

The Shelduck did not return to nest in 2020, perhaps because of the increase in walkers, cyclists and golfers, however they are still seen regularly in the vicinity. Stonechats returned to the reserve to nest for the first time since the severe winter some years ago.

The wet winter produced water levels in the dune slacks greater than I have ever seen, that were dramatically reduced when the dune gave way. The pictures below show the water level the day before the dune rupture and the resulting gap in the dunes.



*David Jenkins*

## Dr. Jean Balfour retires from Fife and Kinross Group

Last year Dr. Jean Balfour stood down as president of the Fife and Kinross members group after almost 40 years in the role. In all that time she quietly and competently supported the group committee in all its activities, and chaired every single AGM! However, her association with SWT goes back much further, as Jean is actually a founder member of SWT nationally. She helped to establish the principles which still guide SWT today, of protection and encouragement of all wildlife in Scotland. She is also the owner of Handa Island, one of SWTs nature reserves and takes an active interest in its management.

Her love of nature and wildlife goes right back to her childhood, growing up on Scourie Estate in the north west Highlands. One of her earliest childhood memories is of lying in bed in the very early morning listening to a blackbird singing loudly outside. Jean's special interest however, is botany and in particular arctic alpine ecosystems. She has taken part in many expeditions across much of the arctic and written and contributed to many academic papers. She was Chair of the Countryside Commission for Scotland from 1972 to 1982, and took an active role in the work of the Commission, including training of Rangers from across Scotland.

She has helped out at many of the important events for Fife and Kinross group, including tree planting at various reserves for our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the opening of Fleecefaulds and Cullaloe reserves.

Back in Fife, at the family home in Balbirnie, she continues to enjoy the bird life around her home, and looking forward to the return of the spring migrants, as we all do! The Fife and Kinross group is very grateful to Jean for all she has done for Scotland's wildlife and the invaluable support she has given to the local group over so many years and we wish her a happy retirement from her busy life.



Dr Balfour with George Ballantyne and members of WATCH

# EVENTS SUMMER 2021

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



**Wednesday 16 June 2021 06:30 pm: Outing: Shell Bay to Cocklemill Burn, St Ford and Ruddon's Point. Duration 2.5 hrs**

Lindsey Adam will take us on a forest walk to the burn and saltmarsh, beach and Ruddon's Point SSSI. Particular highlights: wildflowers, butterflies, Sand Martin colony and possible red squirrels. Easy walk over mostly flat terrain. Café option at the end.

*Meet: Car Park at entrance to Shell Bay Holiday Park: KY9 1HB; NO469 004.*

**Saturday 19 June 2021 10.00 am: Outing: Auchtermuchty Common. Duration 2.5 hrs.**

Stewart Collier will lead an easy walk on undulating paths and tracks looking for flowering plants and insects. There will be a café option for those needing sustenance.

*Meet: Car Park at Common entrance off B936:*

*KY14 9EQ; NO 236 134*

**Sunday 27 June 2021 10.30 am: Outing: Cambo Loop via Kingsbarns. Duration 2.5 hrs.**

Tim Viney will lead an easy walk on mostly made up paths with some uneven sections along the shore plus a few gentle climbs. Walking through woodland and along the coast there is the chance of seeing a wide variety of birds and possibly mammals. Café option at the end.

*Meet: Cambo Car Park: KY16 8QD; NO 602 111*

**Sunday 8 August 2021 10.00 am: Outing: Blairhall Bing Woodland - a new landscape. Duration 2.5-3 hrs**

Mixed woodland on former coal bing with an interesting and developing ground flora. The adjacent wetland floodplain is being enhanced in partnership with West Fife Woodland Group as part of the Inner Forth Futures project. Good range of birds, fungi and flora and, if time allows, a possible heronry. Good paths throughout and mainly level although a short climb to viewpoint. Some mud may be encountered! Cafes in Culross: Bessie's, Biscuit or Rankines (2.5 miles). Onsite picnic also an option. Led by Richard Smith.

*Meet: Car Parks on both sides of the B9037 just north of Shiresmill: NT 000 883*

**Saturday 18 September 2021 10.00 am: Outing: Tay Estuary and Morton Lochs (part of Tentsmuir NNR). Duration 3.5 hrs.**

Linda and Stewart Collier will take us on a 4 mile easy walk on good paths and tracks along the estuary looking for waders. Then into the forest to Morton Lochs with possibility of seeing red squirrel. If conditions allow we will have lunch near Morton Lochs before returning to the car park. Café option at the end of the event.

*Meet: Car Park and Recycling Point, Links Road North, Tayport DD6 9EB; NO465 281*

## **Events Updates and Latest News**

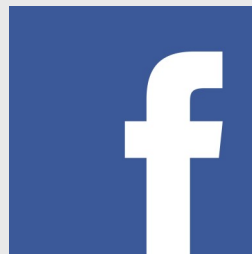
Be sure to regularly check our web site:

(<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/local-group/fife-and-kinross/>)

and Facebook pages

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

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



## **CONTACTS**

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