

# Fife and Kinross Group



## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 114 Spring 2022



### Message from Stewart Collier, Chair



I hope you all managed to make the most of the unseasonably warm Christmas/New Year and get out into nature and see some wildlife.

November's storm Arwen brought down and damaged many trees, with most reserves recording

unprecedented devastation. This brought about dramatic changes in the landscape, but such upheaval also presents an opportunity to increase forest diversity, expand the provision of wildlife-rich dead wood and create more variation. We think they're disasters, and momentarily they are, but in the grand scheme of things, this is natural. Estimates suggest that 7 million trees have been affected in Scotland and this could have significant biodiversity benefits. In natural woodland 25% of wood is dead, but in most managed woodlands this is a lot less. The aftermath of Storm Arwen is an opportunity to leave dead and decaying wood in situ, creating richer wildlife habitats.



High winds are likely to hit the UK more often and with greater strength as the effects of climate change become more apparent because warm air holds more moisture which fuels storms.

Last year I suggested that gardeners should be turning away from using peat based composts and finding garden centres with plant suppliers that don't use it. I tested 3 different peat free products in our garden and as is often the case the most expensive and hardest to source was the best. During communication with Butterfly Conservation it was suggested that I try an organic wool and bracken compost produced by Dalefoot Composts ([www.dalefootcomposts.co.uk](http://www.dalefootcomposts.co.uk)) located in the small valley of Heltondale, Penrith. This can be purchased via the company's website or St Andrews Botanic Garden Centre, St Andrews, 01334461200. The product is easy to use and most importantly gives excellent results.

Trying to find Fife garden centres that have plants grown in peat free compost and free from lasting insecticide was impossible. Of the five centres that I contacted only one responded to my emails. As the plants stocked by that garden centre came from several suppliers they were not able to indicate if any were peat and insecticide free. Thankfully I found Garden Beauty who not only have peat free plants but have their own bee hives in and around the plant growing area with no harmful insecticides used ([www.gardenbeauty.co.uk](http://www.gardenbeauty.co.uk)). The plants I ordered were excellent quality in fully recyclable packaging.

Looking forward to spring I would like to remind members that many commercially grown bedding plants have been treated with insecticides so would recommend growing your own plants from seed.

My wife and I have been fortunate to see up to six Bulfinches in our garden every day since last October. They have been feeding on the fruits of *Leycesteria formosa* (Pheasant Berry) then moving on to our sunflower hearts. A vigorous and easy-to-grow shrub, it should be pruned each year by cutting back one in three stems to ground level each spring. This will encourage strong new growth and produce a more attractive shape.

I look forward to meeting some of you in 2022 and as we go to press the Group is hoping to have a presence at the Fife Show on Saturday 21 May.

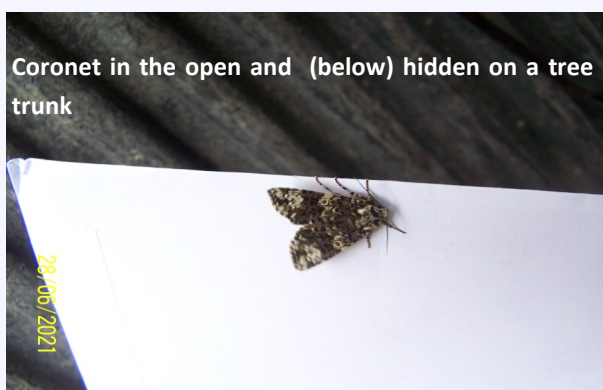
## **MOTHING by Tim Brain**

There are some 2,200 species of moth that are considered resident in the U.K. and Ireland. They are split into two general groups – Macros, mainly the larger ones and Micros, the smaller ones, but as in all generalisations there are exceptions and some Macros are smaller than some micros and visa versa. The sizes range from the Death Head Hawk Moth with a wing span of about 120mm (5 inches) down to pin-head micros like the Cocksfoot Moth at 5 to 6mm.



***Poplar Hawk Moth: the largest resident moth in Scotland compared to a Cork Moth.***

The colours are just as variable with most designed to provide camouflage when resting, while others are brightly coloured to scare predators or indicate they are potentially poisonous, because of the caterpillar food-plants; an example being the black and red Cinnabar Moth, whose caterpillars are the yellow and black ones that feed on Ragwort.



Most species of moth fly at night and are attracted to light, but some only fly during the day. Some of the micros will only fly in sunshine and can then do so in large numbers in a small area.

The attraction to light is used as the most common and productive method of recording which species are present. There have been several light traps developed over the years which aim to prevent the moths escaping once they have entered the trap. A home-made trap can be just as effective as a commercially made one and be made for a fraction of the cost. The most commonly used light sources are Mercury Vapour (MV) and Actinic bulbs both of which produce ultra-violet light. MV produces a very bright light and can draw in moths from some considerable distance, while the actinic is less bright and so only attracts those within a short distance of the trap. The actinic is probably more suitable for those trapping in gardens that have neighbours, who could complain about a bright light shining in their windows at night! LED lights are now starting to be used. The best nights are warm, muggy ones with a slight fog/haar, because the light reflects off the water droplets and produces a large ball of light rather than just a point source; unfortunately, such nights are few and far between. I use a time switch to turn my traps on and off so I am not tied to being around.

Weather is a critical factor in the number of moths flying on a given night, with temperature being the most important factor, followed by wind and cloud cover. A still, cloudy night with the temperature well above 10C will produce far more moths, not only quantity, but also species variety, than a clear moonlit one. If there is any wind above a light breeze, I always try to place my traps in a sheltered position, which could be provided by a hedge, wood or undulation in the ground. Another aid to increasing the species range of your catch is to hang a sheet a few feet away from the trap, as there are some which although attracted to light are reluctant to go close enough to be caught. The moths will settle on the sheet and can then be caught; however, you will need to stay at the trap because as dawn comes the moths will leave as the sheet provides no places to hide from predatory birds. Birds can be a real problem, especially during May and June when they are feeding young. I find Great Tits are the worst as they very quickly learn to recognise a trap, find out how to enter it and then eat everything inside. Blue Tits, Robins and Wrens will also enter a trap, while Pied Wagtails will pick-off anything on the outside. The answer is "to get up with the Larks", cover the trap and then go back to bed!





***The trap in action - the black dots on the sheet are moths!***

There are other methods that can be used, the most obvious being a torch and net from dusk on. This can be very productive where there is a profusion of flowers, either garden or wild ones. Garden species that are good are lilies, catmint, buddleias, cotoneasters and sedums in the Autumn, while wild flowers such as pussy willow, bluebells, champions, ragwort, willow herbs and scabious are very good. Also, from late Summer fruit and berries are a good place to look, such as the plum family once the fruit is really ripe and starting to split, native Rowans (not ornamental, if the birds don't like them then usually the moths don't) Rose hips, particularly Moyesii shrubs roses and the native Dog Rose, and then in late Autumn the bright red berries of Guelder Rose (the native viburnum) will often have some of the late flying species feeding on them. With berries I do find that their popularity varies from year to year and I suspect this is probably due to the amount of sugars that have been produced in the fruit during the Summer.

A final area to look with a torch in high Summer is at tree leaves that are covered in 'honey dew'. When looking for moths with a torch it is very often the reflection of the light from their eyes that you see first.

At home I have recorded over 300 species of Macro moths and over 200 Micros. I would not describe where I am as a particularly good site, as we are at 550ft above sea level and very exposed to the West, by the gap between the Ochils and Campsie Fells, with a clear view to the Argyll mountains to the West of Loch Lomond; over 50 miles for the wind to come! Although I have been recording Macros here for over 15 years, I am still adding a few new species to the list each year, some because of range expansion and some vagrants that have wandered. The Micros though I only really started seriously to record 4 years ago and so I expect there are a good number of species to add to my list. I have already had one new species (*Oegoconia deauratella*) for Scotland.



You never know what might turn up and that is what makes moth recording so fascinating.

## KILMINNING & WEST QUARRY BRAES

There have been important recent developments affecting two of our reserves near Crail: Kilminning Coast and West Quarry Braes.

### Kilminning

FAWN readers will maybe recall (FAWN 111 Spring 2021) that the Crail Community Partnership (CCP) recently took ownership of the reserve and surrounding land following asset transfer from the previous owner, Fife Council. The long term plan is to create a larger wildlife-friendly habitat incorporating the reserve and work has already begun on the site. A tree planting event is planned for the middle of March when it is hoped to plant 1000 trees! As a consequence of the change of ownership, the Scottish Wildlife Trust has passed the management role for Kilminning to CCP. It is no longer, therefore, an SWT reserve.

## West Quarry Braes

This SWT reserve, was originally a quarry and then a Fife Council landfill site. Large quantities of soil were used to cover over the rubbish and several trees, notably Ash, were planted to improve the site as a wildlife habitat. It has not been actively managed for some years now and has become somewhat overgrown, while the recent storms have resulted in several fallen trees. Nevertheless, it is still an important site for migrant birds and other species.

Recently a small group including representatives from SWT and Fife Bird Club surveyed the site and discussed ways of generally improving the habitat, particularly with a view to carrying out mist netting and ringing of migrants. Following a call for volunteers, we have assembled an enthusiastic squad who, at the time of writing, have already made significant progress in clearing scrub and creating paths. The work will be ongoing through March after which the reserve will be left to the wildlife until the autumn when operations will resume.

## EVENTS SPRING/SUMMER 2022

Any suggestions? Able to lead a walk? Give a talk? Get in touch : [secfifekinswt@gmail.com](mailto:secfifekinswt@gmail.com)



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

**IMPORTANT:** For these and all events, places must be booked via the Scottish Wildlife Trust Main Website: <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/wildlife-events/> Be aware that these and almost all events have limits on numbers so early booking is advised.

*For anyone who absolutely does not have access to the internet, you may phone committee member, Alison Irvine, (01337 830366) to make a booking for an event, if spaces are still available.*

### Saturday 19 March 2022 12:30 p.m Outing: Culross

Bird watching around the ash lagoons or, if weather inclement, botanical ramble along Culross byways! Richard Smith will guide us.

Meet: Culross East Car Park NO 990 859

### Saturday 23 April 2022 10:30 am: Outing: East Lomond

A walk to look for Green Hairstreak butterflies and to try luring Emperor Moths using a pheromone. Including a stroll to visit the old limekiln. Led by Susan Falconer. Lunch opportunity in Falkland.

Meet: East Lomond Car Park (by radio masts). NO 252 058

### Sunday 8 May 2022 10:30 am: Outing: Craighall Den, Ceres

Circular Walk to Craighall Den to look for woodland wildflowers and birds. Another old limekiln to visit. Led by Susan Falconer. Lunch opportunity in Folk Museum Tearoom.

Meet: Main Car Park, Ceres village centre (opposite Folk Museum). NO 399 114

***N.B. See previous page for moth trapping dates.***

### 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!



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