



# Fife and Kinross Group

## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 119 Autumn 2023



### Message from Alison Irvine (Acting Chair)

As I write this at the end of September, I've got my fire on and the rain is pouring down outside! Autumn is definitely here! But there have been plenty other signs of autumn over the last week or two. The pink feet geese have arrived and have been flying overhead. I love to hear the sound of them going past, but it is worrying that they are coming earlier and earlier each year. Not necessarily a sign of climate change, but I think they have been able to nest earlier in their northern breeding grounds in Iceland, Greenland and Svalbard. Another clear early indicator of approaching autumn is when the robins change their tune to the thin, rather plaintive song of winter. A neighbouring farmer (who we will be visiting on a farmland birds walk in November, see the back of FAWN for details) was telling me earlier this week, that he has several robins singing their winter song in his barns, piercing and echoing round the large buildings. I think it has been a good year for breeding robins.

Late broods of house martins were gathering on telephone wires in my village today, prior to starting their long journey south. At the end of August, I watched a large gathering of sand martins, a group of at least 100 feeding over grain and mixed "weed" fields (these are deliberately planted weeds to help soil fertility and structure on this organic farm). Clearly

there were lots of insects attracting them to the area. But the most interesting thing was to see how they were using the taller weeds to rest in, treating them in the way they would a reed bed. They would fly around a bit to feed and then land in the weeds to rest. They wouldn't be eating the weed seeds, nor eating insects off the plants as they are strictly aerial feeders, so it was interesting to see them improvising a resting spot. These sand martins will probably not have nested in the immediate area. As they all looked like juveniles, I suspect they will all be the offspring from various colonies across Fife. I have heard from a sand martin expert that the young birds spend several weeks flying around the general area where they were hatched, getting to know their way around, check out potential nest sites for next year and generally making a "map" in their heads so they don't have to waste time when they return from Africa in the Spring – they can get straight to a suitable nest area and start raising a family!

As you may gather from the above paragraphs, I am a lover of autumn and winter, so I am very pleased that our local Fife and Kinross SWT group will be holding a series of walks and events throughout the winter months. There are details on the back page of FAWN and I look forward to seeing many of you at these outings.

### Kingfishers and the new bridge in Aberdour

*Susan Lindsay*

During the heavy rain, lightning and thunderstorms of 2019, well before the pandemic, the path between Black Sands and Silver Sand in Aberdour, in which a small bridge provides a link, became inaccessible. The people of Aberdour were delighted, when late this summer, the bridge was finally repaired, and the coastal path once again became operational.

As diggers and trucks left and life returned to a sea and countryside scene, walkers were suddenly surprised and delighted to spot a kingfisher over the Dour burn, under the new bridge. The majestic and iconic blue flash was spotted by several excited members of the public. I was lucky enough to witness this spectacle and note it as a highlight to the start of autumn. Many years ago, at the bridge over the Dour burn, in the entrance of the grounds of Aberdour castle, kingfishers were once regular visitors. Now they are back in Aberdour, long may they continue to thrive!



## Dragonflies in Fife

**Gordon Baxter**

The end of the dragonfly season is rapidly approaching. In Fife, at this time of year, you're most likely to see common darters, and possibly the odd common hawker. The Fifeshire VC\* may not exactly be blessed with dragonflies (there are sightings for 15 out of the 29 odonata species listed for Scotland in iRecord), but we do boast two designated British Dragonfly Society hotspots. The first is at Morton Lochs (the ditch in the cow pasture beside the path that runs to Scotsraig Golf Course), and the second is at Portmoak Moss. The remedial work carried out last year at SWT's Bankhead Moss reserve, though, appears to have transformed it into another excellent location for dragonfly spotting. In late July whilst wandering round the reserve, there was a common hawker flitting around the saplings at the side end of the bog.



Common Hawker (male)

When I reached the recently-created cell bunds on the south side, though, there was something of a revelation. In the space of less than half an hour I spotted seven different species around the pools: four-spotted chaser; blue-tailed damselfly; emerald damselfly; black darter; common hawker;

and common darter, plus a blue damselfly (probably an azure, based on previous experience). I've also seen large red damselflies on the reserve earlier this year, so that means over half of Fifeshire's listed species, all on the one site! This bodes well for next year. More generally, however, the Fifeshire VC suffers from a lack of sightings in iRecord: six species have less than a handful of records, and there are large parts of the VC for which there are few or no records. Dragonflies can turn up in unexpected places: I saw a common darter in the ornamental garden at NTS Hill of Tarvit Mansion in July, for example! It is therefore really important to log all of your sightings in iRecord, for Fifeshire and beyond, so that we can build up a bigger and better picture of the state of dragonflies across Scotland, and the UK as a whole.



Four-spotted Chaser

\* VC = Vice County: a geographical unit of Britain and Ireland that was devised by the botanist H.C. Watson in the mid-nineteenth century, and used for recording purposes. The large, traditional counties were sub-divided into several Vice-counties to produce units of approximately equal size across the country.

(continued)

## Dragonflies in Fife



Blue-tailed Damselfly



Emerald Damselflies



Common Darter



Black Darter

## Introducing the Eastern Lowlands Red Squirrel

### Group - *Hollie Sutherland: Project Coordinator*

The Eastern Lowlands Red Squirrel Group (ELRSG), covering the Kingdom of Fife, part of Perth and Kinross, part of Stirling and Clackmannanshire, aims to ensure red squirrels continue to be a part of Scotland's special native wildlife. We are funded through the Red Squirrel Survival Trust and are working in partnership with the volunteer led Fife Red Squirrel Group.



Photo credit: Ross Forsyth

Photo: Nutalie - famous one eared red squirrel in Loch Leven and our logo squirrel

While 75% of the UK's remaining red squirrels are found in Scotland, their distribution has declined drastically where grey

squirrels, first introduced from North America in the late 1800s, have become established.

With the help of local organisations, landowners and local volunteers, the project is working to protect red squirrels, principally by strategic grey squirrel population management to combat the spread of grey squirrels in key strategic areas and manage the impact of squirrel pox.

In the Eastern Lowlands the project is currently focused on reducing grey squirrel numbers within target areas where red squirrel hotspots are nearby (woodlands where red squirrels are thought to be thriving), where both red and grey squirrels currently inhabit the same woodlands and where we aim to reduce areas with large grey squirrel only populations – to stop them spreading into new areas or red only areas. To detect grey and red squirrel presence we use feeder box surveys, encourage public reporting of sightings and the Fife Red Squirrel Group lead walked transect surveys - in Fife only, we can train anyone outside of Fife. Feeder box surveys enable the detection of red and grey squirrels (and pine marten) via hair sampling and camera trapping.

We are looking for help with monitoring and grey squirrel management. If you are interested in getting involved, please feel free to email at [elredsquirrelgroup@gmail.com](mailto:elredsquirrelgroup@gmail.com). (Cont)

As a volunteer you can adopt a local woodland (any public access woodland near you) and do walked surveys throughout the year, you can monitor feeder boxes and camera traps within targeted woodlands across the project area, you can do biannual walked transects in target woodlands, monitor traps for grey squirrel management and if you are licenced you can help us with grey squirrel dispatch. We can offer training in all areas and provide insurance coverage.

For more information about the Eastern Lowlands Red Squirrel Group please visit our social media platforms: [@elredsquirrelgroup](#)



## EVENTS AUTUMN/WINTER 2023/24

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



We advise sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for outdoor events.

### Sunday 26th November 2023:

#### 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Farmland Bird Walk

*Meet at Downfield Farm, KY15 7TG; NO342 075*

This will be a wellie boots walk on this organic farm to look out for wintering birds, such as pinkfoot geese, skylarks and meadow pipits, finch flocks and with a definite possibility of red kite! We will be on farm tracks and stubble fields. Walk will last about 2 hours and will include a few moderate climbs, though no rough ground.

### Saturday 2nd December 2023:

#### 10.00 am-12:30 pm

#### Bird walk at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs Nature Reserves

We will be looking for winter wildfowl and other winter visitors. Bring binoculars, if possible.

*Meet: Birnie Loch Car Park, NO283 125*

### 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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