



Fife and Kinross Group

Fife Area Wildlife News

No 120 Spring 2024



Message from Alison Irvine (Acting Chair)

I'm afraid I can't help myself! I've got to mention the weather! We have had a really wild winter so far this year, not cold (so far), but lots of rain and wind, and I can't help wondering how this will affect our wildlife. Certain bird species really struggle in this sort of weather – owls, who depend on hearing to locate prey, can't hear on stormy nights, and sea birds can be really battered by storms. Most predictions of climate change suggest that we will have more frequent and wilder storms, so I suspect that the range and distribution of many species will be affected.

However, the wild weather has not been affecting our hardy SWT members who have attended our winter events, apart from the Birnie Loch outing which was snowed off! The seabird watching at Kinghorn had a great turnout, and lots of people had telescopes to help see the range of sea ducks such as the gorgeous Long-Tailed Duck, and Mergansers. There were also Eider, Shag and plenty of gulls of different species. We also had a quick flypast from a Peregrine, which was great for those who managed to see it! Several passersby thought we were looking for the humpback whale which has been frequenting the Forth Estuary, but as we had local whale expert Ronnie Mackie with us, he was able to say that it has apparently move north from here.

However, as a follow up to this, we have arranged a talk for this autumn from Ronnie about our local cetaceans – more details in a later edition of FAWN.

SWT locally has also taken part in an unusual activity for us – a Christmas tree festival! We were invited to take part by St Margaret's Church in Glenrothes and took the opportunity to promote some environmentally friendly ideas for tree decoration. All our decorations were made of natural materials, such as paper, wood, glass, cotton or wool, or indeed were entirely natural such as berries and cones, which were not painted and could be returned directly to the wild after we were finished with them. It was amazing how we were able to create a colourful and decorative tree without the need for plastic baubles and tinsel!

I think in all aspects of life, we need to think "out of the box" and try to minimise our impact of this planet, and all its other inhabitants.

Please have a good look at the events coming up and hopefully we will see you at them, particularly our AGM on May 5th at Lochore Meadows. There are a few places to fill on the committee and we will need a new secretary, so please think about joining us if you can.

Farmland Birds Walk: Sunday 26th November

On a dull but dry day at the end of November, a group of 30 SWT members met and enjoyed a very "birdy" farmland walk at Downfield Farm, Ladybank. This organic farm is a mix of arable, grassland, gorse scrub, boggy bits and ponds and the mixed habitat certainly seemed to encourage a great number of birds. To be truthful, it was the woodpigeons who stole the show - it is not very often I get to say that! There was a huge flock of at least 2,500 pigeons, which flew over and then landed in a small clump of conifers, instantly making it look as if the trees were decorated with silver Christmas baubles! We seemed to get large flocks of almost everything as there were 2,000 Pinkfoot geese feeding in stubble, roughly 3,000 in a flock of mixed corvids, around 500 mixed gulls, as well as Skylarks popping up at our feet through the stubbles and a couple of Snipe. We checked out an area planted with fodder kale, which had Pheasants, many finches and a nice flock of Linnets.

So overall, this was a very enjoyable walk. Many thanks to Bob and Jane Prentice, our hosts for the morning.



Skylark



Linnets

Kilminning Update (As at 1st Feb)

Will Cresswell, Crail Community Partnership

Sheep

The sheep are back at Kilminning to help maintain the botanical diversity by keeping the perennials and rank grass in check. The sheep are mostly cheviots with a few white-faced woodlands and two herdwick. There are signs up asking for dogs to be kept on leads. Please, if you see any issues with the sheep, contact Rob Dewey the shepherd on the phone number on the yellow “sheep in field signs” at the entrances.



Wetland

The wetland construction timetable is now in place. Kilmac have been on site since 8th January. The soil being dug out from the wetland will then be spread across the tarmac, except for the existing parking area. The pond, once dug, will be lined with a 20cm layer of clay and will cover about 0.6 Ha – the size of a football pitch. It should be big enough for a lot of wildlife. The water supply will then be established by diverting the field drain into the pond and in reinstating the existing overflow.



Editor's note: *By the time you read this, hopefully, the pond will have filled and the contractors long since departed!*

ROCK PIPIT RESEARCH PROJECT: Can you help?

Mike Martin

The Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus*) is a familiar bird to those of us venturing to the Fife coasts between St Andrews to the east, and the Forth Road Bridges to the west, but how much do we know about their movements and population? A local colour ring study on Rock Pipits has entered its 4th calendar year in January 2024, based on birds being ringed at communal roosts in Anstruther and Crail, and on their daytime feeding beaches east (as far as Roome Bay, Crail) and west (between Pittenweem and St Monans) of Anstruther. Birds were first noted roosting communally in quayside crab and lobster creels in the outer harbour at Anstruther in October 2021; a second smaller roost of c20 birds was found in the harbour wall at Crail in January 2022. Communal roosting, certainly on this scale, has not previously featured in the literature, and is a notable feature of the local birds' behaviour. Initially the focus of the study was to examine the behaviour of the roosting birds in moving to daytime feeding beaches east and west of the roost. Over the subsequent months in excess of 130 birds have been ringed with a yellow ring inscribed with two black alpha letters, applied to the left leg, and the standard BTO metal ring on the right.

In addition to the emerging picture of the winter use of roost sites and feeding beaches, the study has expanded to consider the different populations involved. We know that there is a local breeding and wintering population, with some birds seen in every month of the year, and also that there is a significant movement of birds to and fro between the mainland and the isle of May. We also know that we have a wintering population of the Northern European race of the Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus littoralis*), with at least 6 birds carrying Norwegian colour rings caught or seen in the East Neuk in recent years. That some at least of these birds spend the winter here (rather than migrate through to winter elsewhere) has been demonstrated, and this has been published as the first evidence of *littoralis* wintering in Scotland (Martin, M. 2022). There is also a link with Shetland, with one bird wintering in 2021/22 here having bred on Fair Isle in the summer of 2022, and another Fife colour ringed bird seen on Fair Isle in the spring of 2023 which might have stayed in Shetland to breed, or perhaps stopping en route to a more northerly European destination. Separation of *littoralis* from the British *petrosus* race on plumage differences is not straightforward as the northern birds only moult into a distinct plumage late in the winter period prior to migrating in April or May, and although some birds are distinguishable on wing length, there is a degree of overlap. So at present, whilst we know that we have a number of different populations wintering with us, the challenge now is to try and quantify these.

Can you help us with colour ring sightings? Whilst the beaches at Roome Bay, Kilrenny Mill, Anstruther and Billow Ness are checked regularly, any additional sightings would be welcomed, and any from outside these regular sites particularly so. It is unlikely that folk will be able to read the two black alpha letters with binoculars, but a telephoto lens or telescope may pick up from some tens of metres. All birds carry a metal ring on their right leg, and some have a plain blue or red above this (allowing me to distinguish some different groupings of birds from a distance). Reports please to Mike Martin: phone/text to 07904060103; email: mikemartinassociates@gmail.com ; all reports will be acknowledged, and if the individual can be distinguished a history for the bird will be provided.

Reference: Martin M. Evidence of wintering Scandinavian Rock Pipits in Fife, Scottish Birds 2022. 42(3) pgs 232-236



Rock Pipit at Roome Bay, Crail © Gordon Baxter

EVENTS SPRING 2024

Any suggestions? Able to lead a walk? Give a talk? Get in touch :
secfifekinswt@gmail.com



We advise sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for outdoor events.

Wednesday 13th March: 7:00 p.m. On-Line Talk - Wildlife Recording

Aimed at beginners, we will be introduced to wildlife recording and what happens in our local area. Learn how you can share sightings and provide a valuable contribution to wildlife conservation.

This online talk will be given by Fife Nature Records Centre, the Environmental Records Centre for Fife and Kinross.

This event is hosted by our partners in Fife Nature and will not be able to be booked through Eventbrite but a Teams meeting link will be sent round to all members beforehand.

Saturday 20th April: Wildlife Discovery Walk 10:00-12:30 - East Lomond Hill

A leisurely walk from the mast car park to the old limekiln and back. We'll look for tiny Green Hairstreak butterflies and the mighty Emperor Moth as well as birds such as Stonechats and Wheatears. There is a good but rough track and it's fairly level; walking boots or strong shoes advised as well as outdoor clothing appropriate for the weather. Please bring binoculars if you have them. (Eventbrite booking essential -15 places).

Meet: East Lomond Hill car park – grid reference
NO252058

What 3 Words [///tasteful.titles.cyclones](https://www.what3words.com/#!/tasteful.titles.cyclones)

Sunday 5th May: AGM 10 am followed by wildlife walks

The AGM starts at 10am, however the room will be open from 9.30am for anyone who wants to come along before for a chat, there is also a café next door that will be open to buy refreshments.

There are several vacancies on the committee including Chair and Secretary as well as ordinary members.

Following the AGM meeting wildlife walks will be led by Richard and Alison. Further details about the AGM will be issued to all members by email in advance of the meeting and will be added our Group webpage and Facebook page.

If you have any questions about the AGM, including wanting to find out more about the vacant positions, please get in touch with the Secretary, Louise Crane (see email below).

Meet: *Lochore Meadows Café, Crosshill, Lochgelly, KY5 8BA, NT 170 961*

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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