

# Fife and Kinross Group



## Fife Area Wildlife News

No 121 Summer 2024



### Message from Andy Cage (Chair)



I'm sitting at Fleecefaulds Meadow SWT reserve as night falls, wondering what I can write for my first message for FAWN since I was elected Chair of the local group at the AGM. The moth trap is set up and I'm waiting for the moths to arrive. The midges already have! Blackbirds are still singing but the warblers fell silent some minutes ago. As many of you won't know me perhaps a few words of introduction would be appropriate.

I can't recall a time when I wasn't fascinated by nature. I was brought up on the edge of a Suffolk town. Behind the garden was a disused clay pit overgrown with brambles and containing woodland and a few ponds. When not in school I could be found there looking for birds, plants and pond life. In my teens I became obsessed by birds and cycled the Suffolk coast "twitching".

University in Edinburgh brought a new range of bird species plus hills to climb and in 1975 I paid my first visit to Fife. After qualifying as a vet and working in country practice in County Durham for two years I joined PDSA in Dundee and loved charity work so much that I stayed for the next 40 years. I met my wife and after a year in the city we moved to Fife.

Work and family ties pushed birding and conservation into the background but when I retired I finally had time to get much more involved, volunteering with NatureScot at Tentsmuir and RSPB at Loch Leven and doing Breeding Birds Surveys for BTO. Recently I have trained for the Riverfly project which aims to assess the health of rivers by identifying and counting certain aquatic invertebrates. After a few working parties at SWT's West Quarry Braes reserve I was "persuaded" to join the local group committee. When the opportunity arose to become Convener here at Fleecefaulds I jumped at the chance. Visiting a site regularly and getting to know it well is extremely rewarding and something I can recommend. Find your own local patch, watch it regularly and who knows what you might find.

It's almost completely dark now, a crescent moon is out and a fox just called eerily from the valley bottom. Unexpectedly the loud piping of an oystercatcher flying over breaks the silence. The clouds have cleared which doesn't bode well for the moth count as they prefer overcast conditions but there is a chance of an aurora.

Next week I'll be heading back to Suffolk for a birding holiday in my old haunts and, when I see all the 'Keep Out' and 'No Trespassing' signs, I will be reminded of how incredibly lucky we are to live where we do with a right to roam and enjoy nature responsibly. If you are not sure where to roam or what to look for why not join us on one of our events? I look forward to seeing you out and about soon.

### AGM: 5th May 2024

For the second year we held our AGM at Lochore Meadows Country Park, which again proved to be a really good venue. The AGM was thankfully uncontroversial, with Andy Cage elected to the Chair, and Susan Lindsay voted on as a full committee member, having been co-opted last year. With great regret we said goodbye to our secretary, Louise Crane, and to Susan Falconer, both of whom stood down for personal reasons. Thanks very much to both for all your work for SWT Fife and Kinross over the last few years.

After the formal meeting we headed outside to enjoy a walk to the Clune, an area of natural grassland to the south of the Loch, which has miraculously survived all the mining activity. Richard Smith was our guide and he was able to point out the many archaeological sites, ranging from bronze and iron-age hut circles, to medieval and 18<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings. We were very pleased to see many of the early spring flowers such as field woodrush, yellow mountain pansies, violets and bright red sheep's sorrel. Migrant birds were also singing, and most of us

we were able to hear and see our first whitethroat of the year. Susan Falconer amazingly picked up on 2 swifts flying about half a mile away, and even more amazing, most of us were able to see them!

Susan, again, led us to our most gory find of the walk, when she found a ladybird paralysed and being eaten alive by a parasitic wasp larva. It wasn't the most pleasant of finds, but extremely interesting.

Thanks to all who contributed their knowledge to make this, again, a most interesting and informative walk.

**Alison Irvine**

**Editor's note: The committee is also extremely grateful to Alison who has admirably fulfilled the roles of Acting Chair and Treasurer for the last two years.**

## **RESERVES ROUND-UP**

### **Carlingnose Point**

Gorse continues to be problematic but there's no doubt it looks very dramatic at this time of year. It was nice to see some other wild flowers making an appearance on my last visit at the end of April including bluebells, common dog violet, Solomon's seal and good old dandelions and daisies; vegetation monitoring is planned for the end of June. I never tire of the more unusual angles you get of the Forth Bridge from the point.



*Irene Motion*

### **Fleecefaulds Meadow**

After a few years without grazing the coarser plants were starting to dominate the orchids and meadow species that we are trying to conserve so in November 2023 the SWT's Flying Flock of Chevease sheep was brought in. This beautiful breed sheds its own fleece so doesn't need shearing - they can look a bit scruffy at times but the long-tailed tits love the wool for nest-building. A team of Sheep Looker volunteers was recruited and visited to count and check the flock daily. A huge thank you is due to them for their efforts - only a single day was missed due to extremely icy conditions before the ewes were removed in early May. Early signs are that the grazing has worked well with good control of the coarse plants and a network of paths making access easier.



Thanks to the generosity of the Akin Oaks Art Project we were donated three oak trees grown from Fife acorns. They have been planted near the car park and will hopefully provide a nice canopy in years to come.

At least three woodcock overwintered under the hawthorns, ravens regularly display over the reserve, several roe deer fawns were born and badgers have been seen mating on trail camera and have successfully raised several cubs.



Moth recording has been carried out several times but because of the poor spring weather the catches have been disappointing. However time spent on the reserve at night has confirmed that both tawny and barn owls are present in the area.

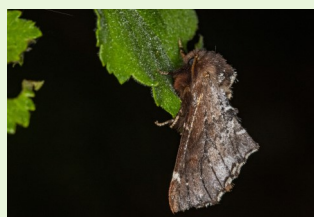
*Andy Cage*

### **Bankhead Moss**

At Bankhead Moss, I have been focussing on recording the fauna. Up to mid-May, I have recorded over 70 species of bird this year, either on the reserve or flying over it. I've also recorded six species of large mammal so far: roe deer (the most numerous, maximum count of 19), fox, badger, brown hare, red squirrel and a single grey squirrel. The last is a concern for the population of red squirrels on the reserve, given that squirrel pox has reached Fife.



Hoverflies and butterflies have emerged in good numbers since the weather turned warmer, and dragonflies and damselflies are now appearing in numbers – all nine species that are regularly recorded in Fife occur here. It is interesting to see what comes to the bunds (pools) that have been created on the moss. Moths recorded this year include Scarce Prominent, Lesser Swallow Prominent, Pebble Prominent, Iron Prominent, Ochreous Pug, Cinnabar, Red Sword-grass and Heath Tortrix.



*Scarce Prominent*

I have also met twice with Alison Davies and Lyn Jones, who have been showing me many of the moss species on the reserve. I have been discovering just how difficult it is to identify the various Sphagnum species!

*Steve Buckland*



## Lielowan

Sadly I have to report that Lielowan is in a poor and probably declining condition. This is due to the boundary fence having been damaged by a car coming off the road a couple of years back, which has prevented any grazing being undertaken. This has resulted in the more competitive grasses, etc. over-topping and suppressing the more diminutive plants. Ideally for MG5 grassland the sword height should be between 5 and 20cm, but on my last visit on the 26<sup>th</sup> May the sword, consisting mostly of grasses, thistles and meadow sweet, was between knee and waist height.

One of the noted species on the site is salad burnet (*sanguisorba minor*), the accompanying pictures are from my visit on the 26th where several flowering plants were noted. However my subjective impression is that the number of plants is in decline compared to a decade ago.



Hopefully a means can be found to reinstate the damaged section of fence and the site can start to be brought back to an improved condition.

**Alan Harvey**

## Fife Ness Muir

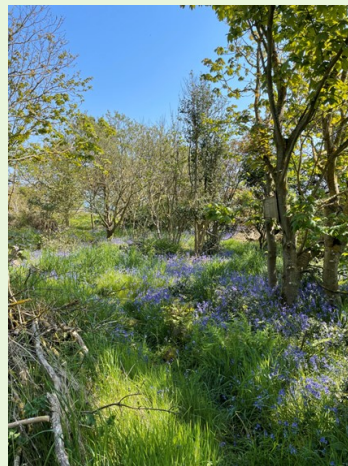
Fife Ness Muir, the 'Patch', is an important bird migration monitoring site. To operate effectively it requires a patchwork of habitats, but in particular coastal scrub. Over recent years much of the reserve has become dominated by maturing trees forming a closed canopy and a large swathe of gorse on what was once an open area of grassland with scattered bushes.

The focus of site management on the reserve is to work at developing and maintaining a more dynamic mosaic of habitat types, creating a mix of open ground, glades, areas of scrub and groups of more mature trees. Over the winter of 2023/24 efforts have continued to remove the gorse, thin out some of the more wooded areas and reintroduce coppicing over other areas.

This work programme was greatly helped by an SWT Work Party on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024. Not only was a significant area of gorse cleared, but many of the now redundant tree guards spread across the site were collected and removed. However, the main task was the dismantling and removal of a badly damaged Heligoland trap.

The bird trap had been in a poor condition and needed significant repair, but during one of the severe storms of the last few winters a large tree fell on to the trap effectively destroying it. Taking the trap apart and removing all the waste materials took considerable effort from all involved. The work is yet to be fully completed but we are almost there. A big thank you goes out to all those involved, and to Crail Golfing Society for their support.

Spring bird migration is now almost over and after a late start due to the poor weather in the early part of the spring, the season proved to be rewarding with 15 migrant species passing through the site. The highlights were a Sparrowhawk on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, 7 Lesser Whitethroat and a Reed Warbler on the 12<sup>th</sup> May and a Great Reed Warbler on the 25<sup>th</sup> May. This last species is a very rare migrant to Britain, a first for the reserve, and one of very few records for Fife.



**Woodland Glade**



**Gorse Clearance**

**Chris Broome**

## **Barnyards Marsh Reserve, Kilconquhar**

Barnyards Marsh is a small reserve in the middle of Kilconquhar village. The joint convenors of the reserve, Elizabeth Bracher and Ken Weir, have decided to retire from this responsibility. We are grateful to them for continuing in this role through a difficult period.

We are seeking a new convenor or joint convenors. The main role of convenors is to keep an eye on the reserve and to report anything which needs attention to Clare Toner, the Reserves Manager.

Some convenors do much more than this, for instance monitoring, practical work and liaison with the local community. This is helpful but not essential. The key role is to act as the local 'eyes and ears' of the reserve and to report any problems. It is not essential to live near the reserve but obviously living within a few miles makes regular visits easier.

If you are interested in taking on this role, and would like to discuss this informally, please contact me through the editor or contact Clare direct.

***Jean Stewart***

## **What happened to FAWN No 120!!**

Many of you will have noticed the absence of the spring issue of FAWN which should have accompanied the last mailing of Scottish Wildlife. Due to an unfortunate error by the carrier, the consignment of FAWNs was delivered to the wrong

address instead of the Trust's Mailing House which meant that the deadline for inclusion along with Scottish Wildlife was missed. An apology was forthcoming and we have been assured that it won't happen again.

## **EVENTS SUMMER 2024**

**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.**



## **Saturday 6th July: 2:00-4.00 p.m. Outing - Moth Trapping**

Under the guidance of Tim Brain, we will be inspecting the moth traps which were set up the previous night to see what species have been caught. Booking essential via Eventbrite. No Dogs!

**Meet: Keith Hills Farm, Rumbling Bridge, Kinross, KY13 0QQ; NT 035 985**

**Please note:** Further events for later in the summer/autumn will be announced via our Facebook page, the website and via email (for those members who have opted into email communication).

### **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:**

**Secretary:** [secfifekinswt@gmail.com](mailto:secfifekinswt@gmail.com)

**FAWN Editor:** Ian Hunter, [rsrvsfifekinswt@gmail.com](mailto:rsrvsfifekinswt@gmail.com)

**Reserves Manager East Central Scotland:** Clare Toner, [ctoner@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:ctoner@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)