

Fife and Kinross Group



Fife Area Wildlife News

No 122 Autumn/Winter 2024



Message from Andy Cage (Chair)

Since the last newsletter I seem to have spent a lot of time in, near or thinking about water. Once a month I've been donning waders and counting aquatic invertebrates near Cupar for the Riverfly initiative for the River Eden Sustainability Project. Hopefully, with regular monitoring, we can detect

pollution incidents quickly and improve the overall health of our waterways. Clearing reeds with NatureScot in Morton Lochs to improve views from the hides was hard work but rewarding with sightings of little grebes, damselflies and kingfishers close by.

On the dunes at Tentsmuir point and at the community tree plantings in Buckhaven I saw the impacts of coastal



erosion caused by recent winter storms.

At our raised bog reserve at Bankhead Moss lack of water caused concern. Although it rained on many days the overall volume of rainfall in



the area was significantly below average in early summer and, compounded by

the drying effect of the birch saplings spreading from the edge, the peat was very dry. Hopefully the continued efforts to remove the birch plus the trial to rewet the bog using dams and artificial bunds will bear fruit in time. We



hosted a local group walk round the site in August and were able to show the attendees examples of the reserve specialities including cross-leaved heath, bog asphodel, carnivorous sundews and an obliging frog.

Introducing New Trust Staff for our Area

Chris Kilmartin: Ranger - East Central Scotland



My name is Chris Kilmartin, I am delighted to introduce myself to you as the new Ranger for the Scottish Wildlife Trust in East Central Scotland. I hope to utilise my experience and deep passion for conservation to care for and develop the reserves we all know and enjoy.

Background and Experience

I have a rich and varied background in environmental conservation and wildlife management. Prior to joining the Scottish Wildlife Trust, I spent 2 seasons as a Countryside Ranger for East Lothian Council. During this time, I engaged with local communities, delivered educational programmes, and helped in the management of conservation projects, all while fostering a greater public understanding of the natural environment. I discovered my passion for this career path whilst working as a Seasonal Ecologist for several environmental consultancy companies, specialising in conducting bat and peatland surveys. An unexpected part of these consultancy roles was engaging curious passers-by in the work I was doing. I took a great deal of

fulfilment and satisfaction from working in our natural environment and sharing it with others.

Passion for Nature

I like to spend my free time exploring the outdoors, observing wildlife and contributing to citizen science projects. I regularly volunteer for organisations such as the RSPB, the British Trust for Ornithologists, and the Scottish Ornithologists Club. I take particular enjoyment from birdwatching, this activity has developed my connection with nature and driven my commitment to protecting and preserving our local landscapes for the diverse species that inhabit them. I recall one specific day working in the field on an expanse of upland peatland. I had spent a cold, grey and soggy morning taking ground measurements. I was covered in peat, tired and soaked through. As lunch time approached there was a break in the weather. I decided it was time to stop for a sit down and a hot cup of coffee. It was only when I paused for this short break that the sun broke through the clouds briefly and I realised there were at least eight Red Kites flying around overhead, some close enough to make out the finest details of their plumage in the sunshine, even without binoculars. At this point in time, I had never seen a Red Kite other than in books or videos. Encounters with wildlife such as these have a way of lifting the spirits.

Looking Ahead

Since taking on this new role I have been fortunate enough to work with some of the many Scottish Wildlife Trust members and volunteers. A particular highlight has been carrying out vegetation surveys on some of our sites. My botanical identification skills are admittedly an area requiring development. I found the members and volunteers that carry out these surveys to be a pleasure to spend time with and learn from. The breadth of knowledge that they displayed on these surveys was inspiring and I have learned a great deal

from spending time with them. I look forward to many more knowledge sharing experiences such as these.

A reserve that has captured my interest has been Bankhead Moss. A rare habitat type for that part of the country, and a variety of species that are not found on the other reserves I help to look after. A reserve that comes with big aspirations. Taking an inactive degrading raised bog and utilising management techniques to transform it back into an active raised bog, invaluable in our battle to limit the negative impacts of climate change. I look forward to getting out on this reserve with as many of you as possible to tackle the encroaching birch, re-dig lint holes, and bash some bracken to help this asset move in the right direction.

Joe Stewart: Reserves Project Officer - East Central Scotland

I'm Joe Stewart, the newest Reserves Project Officer of the East Central SWT Reserves. This means I help with all of the



practical work on the reserves, from strimming paths, fixing fences, installing benches, and so on. I joined SWT just a few months ago, and was working for Forestry and Land Scotland before then. I also spent some time as a Seasonal Ranger at the Loch Lomond National Park, and now completing my studies of Conservation and Wildlife Management, part time.

I'm inspired by the dedication and collective skills of the volunteers I've had the pleasure of working with on some of our Reserves, like Fleecefaulds Meadow or Cullaloe. With these groups, I'm always learning, and always having fun. I look forward to our future projects together.

AUTUMN - By Richard Smith

While autumn doesn't always live up to Keat's ideal of "mists and mellow fruitfulness" it can still be an exciting time of year. The change of seasons is always interesting, especially spring and autumn when nature is moving into high summer or deep winter. Autumn is certainly fruitful and with the end of the summer raspberry season comes the bounty of other fruits – some which we can eat but most are only appetising to birds and mammals. Imagine a time before sugar when your diet would have been quite bland and the autumn sweetness of seasonal fruit must have been a revelation. The first bramble is still exciting - if you can avoid the maggots! Brambles are everywhere and are great habitat boosters providing shelter for small birds, bugs and mammals and great protection for young trees. Even this common and familiar plant isn't always what it appears to be. Bramble is an aggregate name for many microspecies of which over three hundred have been identified so far, so it is likely that your local brambles are different from those elsewhere. I think we've always been aware of this in the past when we recognised that some plants have large juicy berries while others can be a bit more wizened.

A less obvious fruiting takes place in autumn when, if the conditions are right, mushrooms and toadstools appear. What's the difference between mushrooms and toadstools – none! The less edible ones and those associated with elves are usually called toadstools but in ecological terms they are all the same. There are over fifteen thousand different types of fungi in Britain and only a very small percentage are deadly poisonous so probably best to learn about that much smaller number before going foraging.



Porcelain Fungus



Shaggy Inkcap

The fungi we see are only the fruits of a much bigger underground organism. It's under the surface where fungi are directly connected to other plants' roots via the fungi's mycelial network, a root-like structure made of branching, thread-like hyphae. This is

mutually beneficial to both plant and fungus with each giving the other the nutrients and minerals they need. This network of interconnected plants and fungi has been called the "Wood Wide Web" and is an area of extensive research with much still to discover.

Butterflies can be at their most obvious in autumn when second broods are stocking up for hibernation or migration. Red Admiral and Peacock butterflies may be the most common, but it is worth keeping an eye open for little surprises like the wonderfully shaped Comma butterfly. They are really easily seen in the garden on Ice plant (*Hylotelephium spectabile*) which everybody should have in their plant collection.



Peacock



Comma

What's exciting about autumn is the movement of birds. Most of our summer migrants are making their way south and the winter waders, geese and thrushes are making the journey from the Arctic and Scandinavia. There is a small overlap where birds which have spent the breeding season avoiding arctic foxes and polar bears can interact with birds which will soon encounter lions and zebras! Most of our departing swallows will spend our

winter in South Africa while Arctic Terns will travel to the Antarctic.



Swallow

Pinkfoot Geese and Sanderling have spent the summer in the high Arctic coming here for our benign winters.



Sanderlings

Insect-eating birds migrate south to avoid the season of less food but some insect-eating mammals adopt a different survival strategy by hibernating. Bats and hedgehogs are the only true hibernating mammals in Scotland while others like squirrels and badgers can go into a state of torpor.



Reptiles and amphibians also go quiet in the autumn, but their strategy is called Brumation. It is very similar to hibernation in that they have extended periods of very minimal activity to save energy. Reptiles and amphibians body temperatures are dependent on their environment. As it gets colder, they will become more lethargic and less able to hunt, therefore entering brumation is the best way for them to conserve energy.

Robin - by Susan Lindsay

A sunny day in a quiet Kirkcaldy garden, in the month of May and as two friends chat and sip tea, they spot something in the grass. "Liz, look! Waw!" Liz turns from going into the house to get biscuits and looks down at the ground. "Ooo, a lovely yellow flower, nice!" "No Liz, Look!"

As they both look down, they see a tiny, pink, bald body with a massive yellow beak. How this little tot avoided being trampled or eaten was a miracle!

In the middle of a freshly mown lawn with the neighbour's cat looking over in a warm, lazy way, they decide to call the SSPCA. While they wait for someone to arrive, they give the little chick some porridge oats and watch and squeal with delight as it gobbles down the porridge and does a big squidgey poo!

The SSPCA arrive and say that it might be a robin and take it off to be cared for in a secure environment with knowledgeable staff.



Now as it turns to autumn the two friends wonder if their little friend the robin made it and if it will be flying around on the soon to be crisp, frosty days with a belly as bright as the berries on the trees and hopefully as full as it was that day back in May, full of porridge.

EVENTS AUTUMN/WINTER 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.

Tuesday 5 November: Outing to Morton Lochs

10:00-12:00

Meet: Morton Lochs Car Park NO465263

A gentle midweek stroll through Tentsmuir Forest visiting some of the Morton Lochs hides to look for waterfowl and forest birds with the possibility of red squirrel and fungi. *Please note booking via Eventbrite essential*

How to access the Fife & Kinross Local Group web and Facebook pages

Go to scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk. Depending on the device you are using you will find a link called '**Groups**' at the very top of the page or one called '**Local Groups**' at the bottom. Click on this then scroll down and select '**Fife and Kinross**'.



The '**Group News**' page is now being regularly updated and along with our Facebook page:

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

These are the best places to find our forthcoming events and the latest issues of FAWN. Make sure to click on '**Explore all news**' to see all the latest news. If you have any problems with the site please email secfifekinswt@gmail.com

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