



Message from Andy Cage (Chair)



I was listening to Radio 4 the other day when a piece about water voles came on. It immediately took me back to a particular Suffolk stream where, in my youth, I spent a lot of time watching these fascinating animals and hearing the distinctive little plop as they jumped off the bank. It is decades since I heard that sound and that set me thinking about other

things that have changed in the natural world.

Here in Fife we've seen plenty of change. The inexorable rise and resulting vilification of the grey squirrel, for example, and the decline of the reds which at one time were themselves classed as vermin and culled due to damage to forestry.



Magpies, ravens and buzzards, once rare visitors to the east of the county can now be seen frequently in our skies.



Chiffchaffs appear to be increasing while willow warblers are in decline. Spotted flycatchers were once so common that I had three pairs breeding by the house and on one sunny evening a young bird flew down onto my shoulder, to my delight and the distress of the parents. Now I'm lucky if I see a single bird each year on migration.

Climate change is part of the picture with an increase in storms causing devastation to our forests and changes in rainfall patterns leading to flooding in some areas and drying out of land, including some of our rare peat bogs, in others.



Farming practices have also evolved - at the beginning of the twentieth century there were nineteen fields on part of my local birding patch with hedging and walls round them. Now in the same area there are four and most of the hedges have gone. The farm

machinery is heavier and impacts the soil leading to more flooding and damaging the roadside verges.

However it's not all bad news. Across Fife some farmers are trying to adopt more nature-friendly practices and planting trees and hedges, digging ponds, sowing wildflower meadows and recreating marshland. It has been a pleasure to meet some of them over the last year. Conservation bodies and their staff and volunteers are working hard to monitor and clean up our watercourses and encourage the return of the water vole and other riverine species.

Change is unavoidable. Deciding whether to work with change or to fight it will be a dilemma for the Trust, other organisations and private landowners as we consider the future of our reserves and the wider countryside. Are you ready to take up the challenge?

If you have any comments or ideas please let us know at secfifekinswt@gmail.com

Morton Lochs Walks

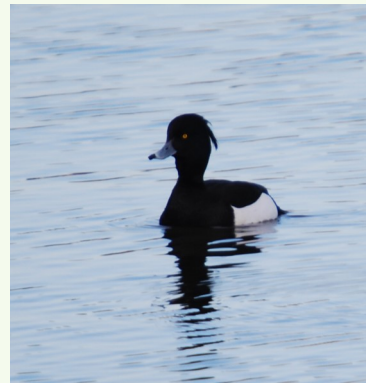


Last year several members asked if we could organise some midweek walks as they were unable to attend at weekends. We booked the first one at Morton Lochs for November with numbers limited to around ten to allow everyone to fit into the hides.

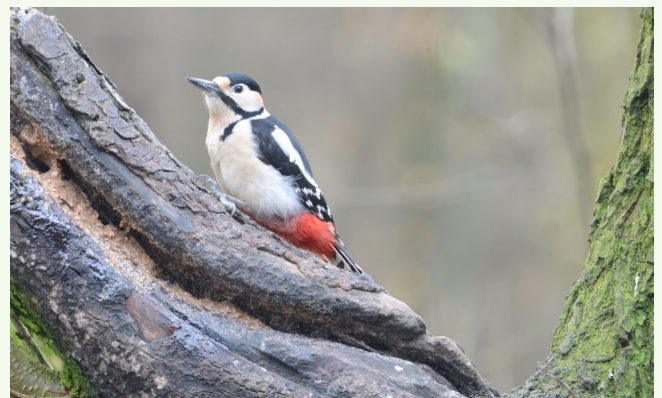


The format seemed to work well with the small group size and relaxed pace allowing time for some discussion about the history of the site and the current management of the National Nature Reserve as well as giving everyone the chance to see everything that was spotted. There were plenty of birds on the loch with gadwall, little grebe and grey heron perhaps the highlights. A curlew, redwings, fieldfares and flocks of pink-footed geese passed overhead with distinctive calls and goldcrests and siskin were seen in the forest. For many the highlights were the close-up views of two stunning jays and a couple of red squirrels. Thirty bird species were seen in all.

As this trip had been overbooked it was decided that it would be run again in January. The day started extremely foggy but fortunately had largely cleared by the time the walk started. The South Loch was empty of birds and there were far fewer than last time on the North Loch, the ice of the previous weeks having driven most away to milder parts. However, as the sun broke through, the spring plumage of the male mallards, teal and tufted ducks was much admired.



Several jays were seen and heard and at least four red squirrels performed in the conifers. Several great spotted woodpeckers drummed loudly nearby and the walk was rounded off nicely by a flock of lapwings, flashing black and white in the sun, flying across the field



The plan is to repeat this walk every few months as long as members are interested and perhaps extend the mid-week small group events to some other venues. Keep checking the 'News' page on the Local Group's website for booking details!

Andy Cage



Edith Cormack, who sadly died last year, had a lifelong passion for plants and their conservation. On moving to Fife, she became very involved with the local Branch of the SWT, acting as both secretary in the 1980s and later as chairman from 1993 to 1996. She pursued both roles with enthusiasm and hard work. She contributed greatly to the development of several initiatives, including the commissioning of *'The Nature of Fife'*, a unique record of the natural history of the area. It was a pleasure to work with Edith, who dealt with routine matters meticulously, had the vision to expand the horizons of the local branch and the drive to carry these through; all executed with a great sense of humour. She made a big contribution to the work of the SWT in Fife and Kinross.

Jean M Stewart

Yvonne McCrone

I am sad to report the death of former local group Chair, Yvonne McCrone. Yvonne was an enthusiastic wildlife lover, being particularly keen on trees, and for many years she planted trees all over Fife with SWT volunteers and helped to tend our tree nursery in the 1980s and 90s. In November 1990 she was elected Chair of the Fife and Kinross Local Group, a role she was very hesitant to accept, as she was sure she did not have the experience! How wrong she was!

For three years, Yvonne led the local group with great diligence and enthusiasm, and in particular, I remember that she introduced regular Chairman's walks. These often took the form of a quiet meander round some perfectly "ordinary" places in Fife's countryside, where there was always something to see. She was particularly proud of the badger sett near to her home and organised watches there occasionally.

Yvonne moved away from Fife to Argyll to live and work with her daughter, where she continued to plant trees, creating wooded areas where previously there had been none. She died after a short illness in December 2024.

Alison Irvine

This was a return visit to Downfield Farm in the Cults area near to Pitlessie, after a very successful visit in November 2023. Perhaps it was the different time of year, or the particularly cold wind, but there were no large flocks of birds to be seen this time. However, we had good views of 2 buzzards, and a kestrel popped above the horizon briefly, and at least two hares were spotted.



Kestrel

However, the main highlight of this visit was Bob Prentice, the farmer at Downfield who accompanied us on the walk! Bob is a keen wildlife enthusiast and runs his farm organically. It was absolutely fascinating to hear from him about how he manages the farm, with the growing of organic oats which he can only guarantee are "gluten free" if there has been no barley growing in the field for at least 2 years previously. He also spoke about the success of out-wintering his herd of Black Galloway cattle, who get plenty natural shelter in the gorse. He currently has 300 blackface ewe lambs, from an organic hill farm in Sutherland. They spend the winter at Downfield, to ensure that they are not accidentally caught by the tups, which are out on the hills of Sutherland with their mothers. Then in March, these lambs go back to Sutherland to be the breeding ewes in spring of 2026. We then headed up to the top of Downfield hill to see the iron age fort remains, and good views all around.

At the end of the visit, we went to see a badger sett just behind the farmhouse. There was fresh bedding being aired at the sett entrance, and then we found a badger skull lying in the earth. Thanks to the veterinary knowledge of Andy Cage, he was able to deduce that the badger had died from an infection to the bone, possibly after a serious bite wound to the jaw.

So, although we did not see a large number of birds, we had a really interesting visit to Downfield farm again.

Alison Irvine

EVENTS SPRING/SUMMER 2025

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.

Sunday 9th March: Outing to Ruddon's Point

A coastal walk for winter wildlife. We will be walking on the north coast of the Firth of Forth looking for waders, divers, grebes and sea ducks such as eider and scoters as well as other coastal wildlife

Meet: Shell Bay Car Park NO 469 004

Sunday 13th April: Outing - Fife Coastal Path Inverkeithing to St David's Harbour 10.30

A walk on a level path with good views of the Forth to see what spring migrants have arrived plus some interesting plants and geology. Possible diversion to Letham Hill Wood.

Meet: Ballast Bank Community Car Park, Preston Crescent, Inverkeithing, KY5 8JH. [What3Words /// suspends.rivers.sting](http://What3Words.com/suspends.rivers.sting)

Tuesday 6th May: Outing to Morton Lochs 10-12

Midweek stroll through Tentsmuir Forest, visiting some of the Morton Lochs hides to look for waterfowl and forest birds, with the possibility of red squirrels and crossbills.

Meet: Car park at Morton Lochs National Nature Reserve, nearest postcode DD6 9PE, OS Grid Reference NO 46474 26355, [What3Words /// euphoric.flamingo.seated](http://What3Words.com/euphoric.flamingo.seated)

Sunday 11th May: AGM 10 am followed by wildlife walks

Agenda

- Apologies for absence;
- Approval of the Minutes of the previous AGM:

- Matters arising from the Minutes;
- Approval of the annual report;
- Approval of the Group's verified accounts; and
- Elections of office bearers and Committee members.

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.

Following the AGM meeting wildlife walks will be led by Richard and Alison.

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

Saturday 24th May: Outing to Glen Turret

A walk beside the reservoir highlighting raptors and other upland birds. Past sightings included ring ouzel, red kite, osprey, merlin, red grouse and common sandpiper.

Tuesday 3 June: Outing to Fleecefaulds Reserve

An opportunity for a small group to visit one of our local Trust reserves to see orchids and globe flowers and other meadow wildlife.

Saturday 21st June: Bioblitz at Dumbarrie Links - 10.00 am-3.00 pm

Guided by several experts event offers a unique opportunity to learn, explore and document the diverse species inhabiting this stunning coastal reserve. No previous experience required - beginners welcome.

Please note: (i) For all these events, except the AGM and Bioblitz, booking via Eventbrite essential; (ii) further details of outings will be emailed to members on the emailing list; others please check the website and Facebook pages (see below).

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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