

Autumn 2011 NEWSLETTER



Scottish
Wildlife
Trust



Mink

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Chairman's News

Something quite extraordinary happened in the biodiversity world this June. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment [UK NEA](#) was published. This is the first attempt to thoroughly value the natural environment for the many benefits it provides to our society. For example: the value of living near a greenspace was about £300 per year for the average UK citizen, a well managed natural environment is worth around £30 billion per year to the UK, it would cost £430 million a year if bees were not pollinating our crops and if the natural filtering provided by wetlands was removed it would cost us £1.5 billion a year to do it ourselves with technology. These might sound like glib figures but the newspapers published them widely and bear in mind that the UK Governments commissioned this work and they are taking notice. In Scotland, the Environment Minister Stewart Stevenson has commented that this assessment is "the most thorough overview so far of the ways in which the natural environment impacts on our lives". He has determined that the value of our natural environment and all the things it provides, including clean water, clean air, food and the biodiversity that underpins these "services" should be brought into all decisions, planning for example, and has asked for a review of Scottish strategies in order to bring this about. I am greatly encouraged by this and I hope I am not disappointed with the outcome later this year.

The summer outings are now well underway with visits to the Red Moss of Netherley in May with David Potter and our convenors Nick and Rose, and a botanical outing with David Welch in June. There was lots of plant, moth and invertebrate spotting to get your teeth into. We also have visits planned to Glen Tanar in July, an evening with bats in August and an early morning walk with Red Squirrels in September.

The Aberdeen Member Centre Committee are still looking for willing and able assistance with organisation of events and activities – please do let me know if you can help us bring wildlife education to others in this area. It is one great way to contribute to wildlife conservation. Email me at roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk

Roger Owen - Chair Aberdeen Member Centre

Update from the Reserves Manager

Unfortunately, I have to start this report with some bad news. During a restructuring of staff our Reserves Maintenance Co-ordinator, Mike Stevens has had his weekly hours cut from 4 to 3 days per week. This will obviously have an impact on the amount of work Mike can carry out on the Aberdeenshire reserves. Initially the proposal was to cut Mike's post (along with another 6 posts) completely. Mike and I would like to thank all the members successfully who lobbied against this proposal.

Red Moss of Netherley

The saga of the Aberdeen Bypass Mitigation Funding continues as debates about the proposed road continue in Scottish Government! We have decided to transfer the proposed funding application to the Scottish Rural Development Fund (SRDP). This funding application is now well under way. If and when the mitigation money becomes available we will work closely with SNH to produce an updated work programme for the reserve.

Mike and his volunteers continue to carry out survey and maintenance work on the reserve, working alongside our Convenors who keep an eye on the site.

Gight Wood

I said in my report in January that our SRDP funding proposal for this reserve was in its final stages. Unfortunately, it is **still** in its final stages, although I believe (hope) we have finally jumped through all the hoops to obtain this funding to ensure the reserve is maintained as native broad-leaved woodland. We managed to escape fairly lightly from the storm we had in May with only a few smaller trees being blown over, which Mike has dealt with.

Longhaven Cliffs

Mike and his volunteers have almost completed "their" section of the new footpath and the contractor has completed most of his section. The most northerly section the contractor was supposed to do has been postponed until after the seabird breeding season. I am currently signing off the design for three new interpretation Boards for the site. Mike has erected three new Threshold Signs at the entrance to the reserve. Some of you may be pleased to know these are a return to the

wooden signage SWT previously used before converting to the large blue threshold signs some reserve have (Gight Wood)

Coulnacraig Meadow

Mike will be providing the site with its annual cut in the next few months. This is an excellent time to visit this small site to see the orchids and other wildflowers.

As always, I am happy to help with any information regarding Aberdeenshire reserves or any other wildlife/SWT related issue. It is easiest if you contact me by e-mail!

Robert Potter
Reserves Manager North East
e-mail rpotter@swt.org.uk

Volunteering Opportunities

Members are welcome to attend volunteer days held on the first Saturday of each month and alternate Wednesdays. Please contact Mike Stevens before the Thursday of the preceding week. Limited places are available for pick up from the Aberdeen area. Actual tasks will be dependent on priorities at the time.
Tel 01466 780164

New initiative begins to remove mink from Aberdeenshire Report by Holly Walker



Aberdeenshire is a key target area in the largest ever initiative to remove breeding American mink from north Scotland. Covering 20,000 km², from rural north Tayside across Aberdeenshire, Moray, the Cairngorms and the Highlands, the Scottish Mink Initiative is a new partnership project between Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS), Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the University of Aberdeen, Cairngorms National Park Authority and 15 other organisations.

Aiming to protect native wildlife, such as water voles, ground nesting birds and economically important populations of salmon and game birds, to help protect local economic stability for the benefit of local communities. The Initiative signals a £920,000 investment in native wildlife conservation, thanks to support from Scottish Natural Heritage through the Species Action Framework, Tubney Charitable Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Scottish Government and the European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme.

Sarah Atkinson, the Scottish Mink Initiative's Aberdeenshire Mink Control Officer, said: "Thanks to efforts undertaken by the University of Aberdeen in recent years, there is already considerably lower numbers of mink in Aberdeenshire than there used to be, with areas like the River Ythan now showing signs of water vole recovery.

"However, in order to maintain this level of success and build on it, there's still a great deal to be done in the north east. The Rivers Don and Ugie require regular monitoring to prevent mink encroaching into neighbouring areas where a breeding population has been previously removed. Over time, we hope to increase the area free from breeding mink in Aberdeenshire for the benefit of local native wildlife, like the water vole and ground nesting birds.

"There is a lot of good will and enthusiasm in the area to continue this work, and by working strategically with the community I hope to set up a volunteer network to monitor mink movements using mink rafts and establish an alert system to help us prevent further spread of the species. While animal control will be necessary, animal welfare considerations will be paramount to our operations."

Hollie Walker, the Scottish Mink Initiative Coordinator, said: "This Initiative is as much about ensuring economic security for local communities as it is about protecting Scotland's wildlife. By taking action now to prevent mink from continuing to impact negatively on our native wildlife, we are also safeguarding local economies and livelihood's which depend on angling, shooting, or wildlife tourism. "The success of this initiative relies on community support and involvement, and we hope that by working with landowners we can deliver real, tangible results to benefit local communities now and in the future.

With its aim to create a 20,000 km² safe haven free from breeding mink, the Scottish Mink Initiative significantly builds on the success of previous mink control projects in the Cairngorms and northeast Scotland. The initiative will establish a strategic monitoring and control zone across the north, extending from the mid-Tay to the South Esk, around the east coast to the River Nairn, and across from Dornoch and Cromarty on the east to Ullapool on the west.

Wildlife At Work

Gavin Forrest

Wildlife is still providing me with plenty of interest during my working hours at the Science and Technology Park at Balgownie.

The onset of winter with deep snow last November meant the car park was virtually empty, as people could not get to work. Instead, a pair of Roe Deer took the place of cars. They worked their way along the hedges and bushes desperate for food. A small holly tree on a bank had sufficiently dense foliage to keep the

ground under it free of snow. In this circle about 2m across, a Woodcock took up residence to roost and presumably root for food.

Spring arrived early this year with a very unexpected sighting of a Small Tortoiseshell on 1st March. Unfortunately, there were no flowers open for it to feed on in the vicinity. Overall, it has been a pretty good spring in Aberdeen this year reflected in lots of singing birds round the Science Park. I heard my first Willow Warbler of the year while sitting at my workbench. I feel that Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs have been more numerous here this spring. All this singing has led on to an abundance of young birds from lots of species filling the woods round the campus with their calls. This bonanza of birds has attracted cats from the surrounding houses but the resident Magpies have been given those venturing into the open a hard time. All this nesting success comes despite the maintenance contractors cutting back bushes and hedges in the middle of the breeding season yet again.

A Dunnock is currently nesting in a bush outside my window. Is it a pair or a more complicated arrangement, for which this species is noted, as more than two adults seem to be present?

Several large trees were brought down by the gales in late May. It will be interesting to see if this has an effect on the ground flora, which is currently very unexciting.

There hasn't been any interesting wildlife making their way in to the building of late. But on the human front my newest colleague is yet another arachnophobe and one of the others is terrified of birds. Do other species have an *irrational* fear of humans I wonder?

Outings Reports

May Outing: Botany in the Turriff Trilogy

Bob Daly

Another, much-anticipated botanical outing led by local recorder David Welch took place in June and, as usual, we explored the parts of darkest Aberdeenshire that others never reach – well it was a bit overcast. I am always impressed on these trips just how much more the trained eye notices when compared with the half a dozen plants most 'more normal' people would spot. As such, I make no apologies if this report is a bit of a species list, it's time to get those plant reference books out and learn a few new ones.

We started in a very small marshy area a few miles southwest of Turriff called Braefoot. Though less than a 100m across this area has long been known as a species-rich island in the middle of the agricultural desert, though it has been

changing in nature as willow scrub moves in – clearly grazing no longer takes place. For such a small area it would be remarkably easy to get lost in here and with the quaking surface it might be a case of ‘never to be seen again’.

We failed to find any Bladderworts which have been recorded here in the past, presumably because of the increase in shade. Coralroot Orchid was another candidate which failed to make it onto our list though it is the perfect habitat for it. On the plus side we did find White Sedge (*Carex curta*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Narrow Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*), Common Wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*) and several different Forget-me-nots including Tufted (*Myosotis laxa*) and Creeping (*M. secunda*). Trying to identify the different Forget-me-nots seems to be a bit of a black art with the presence of hairs on different parts of the plant and the shape of the calyx teeth (the green cup shape that the flower sits in) being significant. The ground-hugging Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) was growing in abundance and I was surprised to learn, given its rounded leaves, that it was a member of the Carrot family and not to be confused with the more southern Wall Pennywort which is in the Stonecrop family. A final, interesting find was Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*).

We then headed off to our second site, Laithers Estate, on the banks on the Deveron River. This is managed largely for fishing – I assume they had not cut the grass paths along the banks just for us – and the lack of attention that most of the site gets away from the river coupled with what I assume is an interesting geology has resulted in a good selection of plant species. One of the first finds along the woodland tracks was Wall Lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*), an innocuous wayside weed to most of us but a fairly rare plant in the NE to the expert. Upland Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea intermedia*) was next, a hybrid between Enchanter's Nightshade and Alpine Enchanter's Nightshade. The latter species is less common than the hybrid though what anything with ‘alpine’ in the name, species or hybrid, is doing in the Aberdeenshire lowlands is a mystery to me. Some sharp-eyed participant then spotted what, after much deliberation, turned out to be Rough Chervil (*Chaerophyllum temulum*). A passing fisherman who had just caught 3 salmon and a sea trout (or so he claimed) had to take second best to this ‘catch’, only the second location in the NE where it has been found. I'm not sure he saw it quite like that.

After a pleasant lunch on the river bank, further finds included the colourful Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*) and Wood Cranesbill (*G. sylvaticum*), Hairy St. John's Wort (*Hypericum hirsutum*), Comfrees in every colour of the rainbow, an interesting though non-native dock called Monk's Rhubarb (*Rumex pseudoalpinus*) with very rounded leaves, Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), Three-veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*) and a couple of less welcome visitors

(Giant Hogweed and Indian Balsam). The physical size of the Hogweed is matched by its latin name – *Heracleum mantegazzianum*.

A couple of further finds were made in the river itself with Perfoliate Pondweed (*Potamogeton perfoliatus*), a fast-declining and now quite rare species, and Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alternifolium*), so-called because of the positioning of the flowers rather than the leaves. Some plants found on the way back to the cars proved too difficult and had to be taken for forensic testing and/or used as practice with one's new reference book. The first may be Various-leaved Fescue (*Festuca heterophylla*) and the other, a Hawkweed (*Hieracium*) may be any of 260 or more micro species recognised in the UK. Rather you than me David.

The final brief visit was to the adjacent Ardmiddle Estate just downstream from Laiters. After a bit of parking acrobatics we succeeded in identifying both types of Golden Saxifrage, Opposite-leaved (*Chrysosplenium alternifolium*) and the much rarer Alternate-leaved (*C. oppositifolium*). These two were growing close together as, I'm told, is often the case. Identifying the latter seems to be the more difficult which probably explains why it has always eluded me. Wood Stitchwort (*Stellaria nemorum*) and Wood Speedwell (*Veronica Montana*), both uncommon, were the final, welcome additions to our list. I don't know what we're going to do next year, there can't be many more plant species to find. Something 'new to science' perhaps?

Summer Evening Natural History Outings

Bob Daly

Back in April a new series of natural history outings kicked off on Wednesday evenings to be held over the summer. The general concept behind these is a very informal get-together of like-minded people with an interest in natural history - both novices and experts being equally welcome - with the aim of sharing knowledge, identification skills and hopefully introducing people to some new and interesting areas they might otherwise never visit. It is hoped that having something regular like this will eventually help stimulate some interest from new faces. Everyone is welcome.

The outings are weekly, usually starting at 6:30/7pm depending on location/day length with a different venue being chosen each time (if BST lasts 6 months then that is 26 venues). A decision as to time and venue etc. is made just over a week in advance so that it is available at the preceding outing. An email is also put out, usually on the preceding Thursday evening, with the same information together with a summary of the findings of the previous outing. Anyone wishing to be added to this email list should send me their name and email address (to 'bobdaly@hotmail.co.uk'). It hasn't happened yet but it may be used to cancel if

the weather is particularly bad. It will not be passed to 3rd parties though it may be used by someone in my place if I'm on holiday or suchlike.

The outings are intended to involve minimal organisation and as such the venues chosen are generally ones with open access to the public and with adequate parking. They are normally within easy access of Aberdeen, sometimes venturing a bit further afield if day length/enthusiasm permits. Designated sites (eg SSSIs) are not generally used. At the time of writing we have had ten outings at the following venues: Bucksburn Valley, Bridge of Dee (upstream), Den of Maidencraig, East Woodlands (north Kirkhill), Scotstown Moor, Clune Wood (Deeside), Tollohill Wood, River Don (Persley/Grandholm circuit), Elrick Hill and the Crook of Don (north of Dyce).

The format for the outings is fairly loose. Depending on the area there will be a specific route followed but individuals are free to do their own thing and/or terminate at any time. No-one will be counting heads and responsibility for safety, ability etc lies with each individual. Knowledge of any known dangers will be made known at the start. Children are not particularly anticipated but are welcome if accompanied by an adult and are of a suitable age (if they are capable of walking 4Km without complaining then they probably qualify – the same applies to adults). No dogs please and no organised groups (eg. teacher with minibus full of school kids).

So if this sounds like your sort of thing then drop me an email (address above) to get the details of the next outing.

Delivery of Newsletters

Gavin Forrest

Every newsletter delivered by hand saves the branch the cost of a stamp. There are already a band of volunteers who deliver a bundle of newsletters in their area, but we could do with wider coverage. So if there is anyone who would like an evening or two of exercise twice a year please contact me.

RSPB Friends of Strathbeg – Bird Food Sales

Due to fluctuating prices, it has been impossible to include a Price List with this newsletter. Latest prices and orders forms will be available to download from the SWT website: www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/

Final Summer Outings 2011

Sat 20th August 8.00pm

An evening of Bats with Isobel Davidson

Meet Haddo House main car park

Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: Roger Owen 01569 762479

Sat 10th September 9.00am

Early morning Red Squirrel watch in Gight Woods with Hollie Walker

Meet car park B9005 4km NW of Methlick NJ832 399

Packed lunch and stout footwear. Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: Roger Owen 01569 762479

Winter Talks 2011/2012

Thursday 20th October 2011
Scottish Mink Initiative in the NorthEast – Sarah Atkinson

Thursday 17th November 2011
Tales of a wildlife tour guide – Stephen Willis

Thursday 19th January 2012
Mountain Hares – Scott Newey

Thursday 16th February 2012
Salmon in the River Don – Jamie Urquhart

Thursday 15th March 2012
The birds in your locality – Grace Banks

Thursday 19th April 2012
AGM then
Wildlife Crime – Andrew Turner

Thursday 17th May
Making a difference to wildlife: SWT planning
Volunteers - Dr Maggie Keegan
SWT National Planning Co-ordinator

All meetings take place at: Main Lecture Theatre, Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen, Tillydrone Avenue, at 7.30 pm. For further details contact: Rodney Payne 01569 763742. Tea and coffee (and tray bakes!) afterwards £1.00.

Raffle Prizes

Gavin Forrest

The branch started running a raffle at the indoor meetings last winter. Members donated all the prizes, meaning that all the money raised went to branch funds. So if anyone would like to donate items for prizes for meetings this Autumn they will be greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have any suitable items.

Contacts for Members

SWT M C Committee	
Dr Roger Owen (Chair)	Tel: 01569 762479 Email: roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk
David Elston (Treasurer)	Tel: 01224 868153 Email: elstoncox@yahoo.co.uk
Rodney Payne (Secretary)	Tel: 01569 763742 Email: rodney_payne@btopenworld.com
Gavin J. Forrest (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 01224 311667 Email: gjhforrest@btinternet.com
Vacant (Planning and Forestry)	
Lynn Wood (Newsletter Editor & Webmaster)	Email: swtnewsletter@yahoo.co.uk
Local SWT Staff	
Rab Potter (Reserves Manager (North East))	Tel: 01828 634205 Email: rpotter@swt.org.uk
Michael Stevens (Reserves Maintenance Supervisor)	Tel: 01466 780164 Email: mstevens@swt.org.uk

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