

Autumn 2012 NEWSLETTER



Tree Bumblebee

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Chairman's News

I write this piece just having returned from a wonderful SWT outing to the Red Moss of Netherley, one of our reserves and a special site in many ways. It is the largest raised bog in Kincardineshire and an absolute haven for wildlife. There were eleven SWT members accompanying our very knowledgeable convenors, Rose and Nick. We spent an enjoyable few hours spotting specialist bog plants, damsel and dragonflies and listing lots of moths from two light traps. It was very gratifying to see such an interested group of SWT members, and it went some way to counter the disappointment when we had to cancel the previous outing to Houghton Country Park for lack of bookings. Please do come along to these summer outings – you will really enjoy them.

I am really pleased to welcome two new Member Centre committee members, Ben Mellor and Julia Galley – so my pleading eventually worked! I'm sure they will be able to contribute a lot to the organisation of the Member Centre activities. We are still looking for one more committee member so please do consider it and let me know if you would like to attend a meeting to see what we do.

I am sure you will enjoy this edition of our newsletter that has some really interesting articles. Please consider contributing some of your own wildlife adventures and pictures.

Compiling Members' Email Addresses

One of the most important ways in which we communicate with you, our members, is through the newsletter. We have always posted or hand-delivered this to all of you but we cannot continue to do this to all 1000 or so members because of steeply rising postage costs. We would like to email out the newsletter to those of you happy to receive it in this format. Don't worry – for those who like real paper in their hands we will continue to deliver it to you that

way. But it would help us to reduce our costs if we could email out as many as possible. If this is something you are happy to do please send us your email address, with your name and address so we can cross-check against our records, to the following email address: swtaberdeenmember@btinternet.com I can assure you this information will not be used for any other purpose. Remember the newsletter is already on the web pages so it can be viewed at any time: www.swtaberdeen.org.uk

Roger Owen - Chair Aberdeen Member Centre

Update from the Reserves Manager

As you probably know, Mike Stevens completed his last day of employment on 31st March this year. I am glad to report Mike has found employment with the National Trust for Scotland on a seasonal part-time basis. He has also been contracted to carry out the strimming of the footpaths at Longhaven and Gight wood. He will be invited (amongst others) to quote for the winter work required at Gight wood as well, which I will be circulating shortly. The team based in Dundee is covering Red Moss of Netherley and Coulnacraig Meadow.

It took a little while for Mike to get himself set up as a contractor and in the interim, I tried to find some other contractor to strimm the footpaths, with little success. Finally a Conservation Team from Dumfriesshire came up for a few days to carry out the work!

Red Moss of Netherley

In the last report I stated that we were in the final stages (after many meetings and much communication) to receive Scottish Rural Development Project (SRDP) funding to construct more small dams within the bog and two much larger dams on large ditches draining the centre of the bog. Unfortunately, this has still not been finalised due to SNH requests for extra quotes for the work. All has gone quiet again with regard to the Aberdeen Western Periphery Bypass Mitigation Fund. SNH have completed their survey to speak to all the other landowners of the whole SSSI with a view to managing the whole site as a peat bog – not just the SWT part! This information has now been passed to myself and I have spoken to two of the four landowners who agreed to their contact details being passed to me (One owner refuses to speak to anyone, including SNH). I am meeting a third landowner later this month. So far, negotiations are going well to produce some type of management agreement with these landowners. Our convenors (Nick Littlewood and Rose Toney) have been keeping an eye on the place and have recorded some good sightings including badger and pine marten with an infra-red camera trap. Duncan has strimmed the access path.

Coulnacraig Meadow

Duncan will be cutting the meadow next month. I will join him to carry out a Site safety Inspection which is now required to be done annually.

Gight Wood

We have finally received SRDP funding of £18,892 over the next three years to complete the following

- * 2 Ha Lodge pole removal to be completed by 31st Dec 2012
- * 2 Ha sycamore removal to be completed by 31st Dec 2012
- * 2.5 ha pa of bracken control over 3 years
- * 4.98 ha hazel coppice (1.66 ha pa over 3 years)

Ongoing management to include

- * 2 Ha Beech stand removal
- * 35 Ha of non-native regeneration, removal and native regeneration.

As stated above I now need to find a contractor to carry out this work. The footpaths have now finally been strimmed and Mike will be carrying out another cut next month. The Tree Safety Survey (mentioned in my last report) has been re-visited with a Tree Safety Expert. The ash on the left hand side going down to Hagberry Pot, do have some type of root disease, and will likely fall down at some point, however the likelihood of this happening when someone is passing is very remote and it has been decided to continue to monitor them closely

Longhaven Cliffs

The footpath has been strimmed (in July) and Mike will strimm next month. There is now a level walking surface all the way along the reserve and we now need to advertise this fact to the general public. Mike has also been working here on a voluntary basis with some other volunteers to do a few bits and pieces to the footpath

Rab Potter

Reserves Manager North East

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Call for public to help chart the UK's bumblebee population

Have you ever wondered which bumblebees roam your garden? Scientists and conservationists are calling for the public's help to map the UK's bumblebee population - all you need is a digital camera.

Though acknowledged as some of nature's most important pollinators, relatively little is known about the geographical spread of these insects. With the help of the public it is hoped that the bumblebee maps – showing their locations across the country - can be significantly improved. To make it easy, a new web tool has been developed by environmental and computing scientists at the University of

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Aberdeen, in collaboration with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT). By taking part, participants will add dots to the map and will learn how to identify the species around them.

Dr René van der Wal from the University of Aberdeen's School of Biological Sciences explained: "Bumblebees have a unique ecology which make them not only fascinating creatures, but also one of nature's most important pollinators, playing a vital role in the fruiting of many of the UK's plants. "However, there are big holes in our knowledge about where to find some species, and how their populations may be changing over time. "We are calling on the public to help us fill this gap in knowledge by taking pictures of bumblebees in their gardens and then uploading them to the BeeWatch system on the Bumblebee Conservation Trust website (www.bumblebeeconservation.org)."

Dr Annie Robinson from the University of Aberdeen's dot.rural Research Councils UK Digital Economy Research Hub and a contributor to the project said: "We want everyone to have a go at identifying the bumblebees in their local area at home, work, or in the park. It's easy; just take a photo of the bumblebee and note where you saw it, then use the interactive website tool to send us your record. Once you have submitted your image online our experts will get back to you confirming the identity."

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust's CEO, Dr. Ben Darvill, is excited about the possibilities: "There are 24 different species of bumblebee in the UK, with a variety of differently striped patterns. It is exciting to think what might be waiting to be discovered in gardens up and down the UK. There is a very real chance of unearthing the first record for a county, region or even country. For example, the distinctive Tree Bumblebee arrived in the UK in 2001 in Hampshire and is spreading rapidly. It is now lined up along the Scottish border – waiting to invade! Someone out there will be the first person to see the Tree bumblebee in Scotland. It is easy to spot – the only bumblebee that is brown, black and white – the colours of a muddy penguin."

The BeeWatch website was developed by computing and biology scientists from the University of Aberdeen working together as part of the institution's dot.rural RCUK Digital Economy Research Hub, in collaboration with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Netherley's Nocturnal Visitors in the Frame

Camera traps have been used for a number of years in studies on rare and elusive creatures. They can help to reveal aspects of a species' range or behaviour that would be virtually impossible to detect otherwise, and have even provided evidence for the continued existence of animals thought to be locally

extinct. The price of such apparatus has dropped markedly in recent years and there is now a range of camera traps that are widely available, albeit primarily aimed at the hunting market.



Last autumn, after using one borrowed from a work colleague for a couple of weeks, we too bought a camera trap. Admittedly, this was purely as a “toy” rather than for any worthy monitoring or research purposes, but we did hope that it would help to reveal what was coming and going from the SWT’s Red Moss of Netherley reserve between our own visits. Camera traps come with a variety of different features and functions – the one we use is triggered when it detects temperature contrasts, such as from a warm animal against a cooler background. It takes colour pictures by day and black and white images, using the infra-red flash, at night, with each image being date and time stamped. We leave it fastened to a tree and swap the memory card on each visit to Netherley, and then view the images at home.

It took a few visits to work out how best to use the camera trap, but we have had it positioned in the same place for a few months now. Early on, the most frequent visitors were Roe Deer. Foxes and Badgers have been regular visitors too. Up to two Badgers at a time have appeared and a fox family generated a series of images with up to four squabbling cubs. The majority of animal visits have been under cover of darkness, though daytime Roe Deer images are frequent, and the fox family has become increasingly active by day as summer has progressed. Birds sometimes trigger the camera too, with visitors so far having included Blackbird, Redwing and Pheasant.

Every time we change the memory card we do, of course, hope that something really exciting has passed by in front of the camera. Then in May, after several months of checking the camera, there were tantalising images of what we were pretty sure was a brief visit by Pine Marten, but the pictures were very obscure. We were delighted, therefore, when it returned on a couple of nights a few weeks later providing unequivocal evidence of the species’ presence on the reserve. Although Pine Martens have been spreading west along Deeside over the past decade, this is certainly the closest record to Aberdeen that we have become aware of and shows that the species now has the potential to turn up across most parts of our region. A further tantalising image was of what we suspect might be an otter. Alas it was moving quickly through the outer edge of the area

illuminated by the infra-red flash, and this time the image is simply not clear enough to be sure of the animal's identity.

Locally, the use of camera traps in wildlife studies has probably received most publicity through the Cairngorms Wildcat Project. This ended recently, but camera trap photos can still be viewed online:

(visit www.highlandtiger.com/index.asp and click through to News or the Blog for images). However, with the ease of use and relative affordability of the cameras available, they are likely to become more and more popular simply for folks keen to see what is prowling unseen in their own area.

Finally, an appeal to any other camera trappers out there – please send your records to NESBReC (www.nesbrec.org.uk). Camera traps are a great way of generating new records and, with a national mammal atlas in the offing, and a regional atlas potentially in the pipeline, these records have never been more useful.

Nick Littlewood & Rose Toney (Red Moss of Netherley Reserve Convenors)

Outings Reports

May Outing: Dinnet

Bob Daly

We had a good turnout for the May outing at Muir of Dinnet and Dinnet Oakwoods, which was led by lepidopterist and general all-rounder Mark Young. We started with a short circuit to the Burn o'Vat where we were told about the glacial origins of the area. The Vat itself was formed by rocks carried by meltwater under the ice eroding away a pot or basin as they got washed around. Such meltwater rivers are a rare example in nature where, given the right circumstances, water can flow uphill owing to the pressure of the ice and this can lead to some unusual formations resulting from the deposition of material. As we had some geomorphology experts in the ranks we discussed the differences between kames, kettles, eskers and drumlins and I'll refer you to Wikipedia for the finer details, suffice to say the main factor is whether the formations are produced by the flowing water or deposited directly from the ice. We stopped to admire the view over Loch Kinord which, along with nearby Loch Davan, is a good example of a kettle hole where a large block of ice left by a retreating glacier has left an indentation in the ground.

At the mouth of the Vat there is now quite a large stand of Aspen trees which Mark told us was probably just one original tree with all the rest being clones produced from the roots. There are a lot of unknowns about the origins and distribution of Aspen but one thing that isn't in question is the value of it for some rare insects. The Aspen Hoverfly, for example, requires rootstocks of large

Aspens in a certain stage of decomposition to lay its eggs. A 'ripe' rootstock apparently smells of almonds or marzipan.

We then embarked on a circular walk between Lochs Davan and Kinord and had only gone a few yards when a Pied Flycatcher was spotted. This is rarely seen in the NE so to get a fairly close view of a male bird was fortunate indeed, especially as we saw it inland as most sightings are made on the coast during migration. After passing through a site where Northern Brown Argus butterflies can be seen in mid summer we visited an archaeological settlement of 'stone-walled houses, enclosures and droveways'. This is thought to be prehistoric though there are also areas of rigs nearby dating from medieval times and Mark further enlightened us as to the turbulent history of some of the islands and crannogs in Loch Kinord. The castle on the main island – the so-called 'mansion of Lochcanmour' – was finally razed by an act of Parliament in 1648. Five dugout canoes and a medieval bronze jug were found in the loch beside it and one canoe (or part of) is still 'in situ' (dived on in 1962). After a quick look at the Kinord Cross we headed back for lunch.

The afternoon was spent looking at Dinnet Muir south of the main road, followed by a quick visit to Dinnet oakwoods. There are some rare moths which breed here and we heard about their habitat requirements and how they are often conflicting. The Kentish Glory moth (long since extinct in Kent) lays its eggs (which we found) only on young Birch trees on the edges of open moorland and only at certain positions on the branches so if the area is left unmanaged and returns to full tree cover they'll struggle to survive. On the other hand, other rare species such as the Small Dark Yellow Underwing would benefit from more extensive moorland or more extensive tree cover. It came as a surprise to learn that much of what is now widely considered long-standing pristine Birch woodland was in fact open moorland until just a few decades ago and much of it subject to regular burning.

Many thanks to Mark for an excellent outing and for fixing the weather and let's hope we are all around to see the benefits of sensible management a few decades hence.



June Outing to Corbie Pot

Bob Daly

Corbie Pot near Kirkton of Maryculter was our starting point for the May botanical outing led by David Welch: we set off in ominously overcast conditions. The highlight of the wood was Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) this being one of only a handful of sites for it in the north east. The Western Peripheral Road is going to pass very close to this site and there is some concern as to what effects this will have on the drainage of the area, this being a plant which likes moist conditions. Other plants in the woods

included Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Upland Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea intermedia*) and a few interesting sedges: Smooth-stalked (*Carex laevigata*), Pendulous (*C. pendula*) and Remote (*C. remota*).

We then visited the banks of the Dee near the Maryculter Hotel and, after finding Northern Bedstraw (*Galium boreale*), Bay Willow (*Salix pentandra*), Tea-leaved Willow (*S. phyllicifolia*), Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and some other typical riverside, herbaceous plants, we had a welcome stop for sandwiches and a natter. On the return we took in the old graveyard near the hotel and found Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) and, most interesting of all, Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*). This last one is actually quite rare in the NE and is not closely related to its commoner 'lesser' namesake being much more like a Welsh Poppy. It gives out a yellow juice which no doubt contributes to it being widely used in homeopathy, not least for the removal of warts.

A quick car shuffle (and a long detour/escape attempt in the wrong direction by some) and we were off again to the southern end of Corbie Den and the man-eating marsh of Blaikiewell. Notable plants here included Small Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata*), the native Masterwort (*Peucedanum ostruthium*), the diminutive Blinks (*Montia fontana*), Matt Grass (*Nardus stricta*) and an orchid which was probably a cross between the Heath Spotted (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) and the Northern Marsh (*D. purpurella*). At least six of the commoner sedges were found here including Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*).

By now the drizzle was starting but fortunately the last sites to visit were just drives along country lanes and tracks. The main interest was a couple of unusual ferns, Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) and Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), both of which are uncommon in NE Scotland. Distinguishing these from other ferns is certainly a bit of a fine art so I'm hoping it's a case of practice makes perfect.

Many thanks to David, not just for enthusiastically leading us around an area that most participants weren't familiar with, but also for his interesting anecdotes, botanical and otherwise.

Articles

Bird watching Trip to Hungary and Romania Summer 2012 Rodney Payne

I went with Russel Nisbet who runs bird watching trips from Montrose. We left Budapest in bright sunlight that continued for the whole holiday with temperatures ranging from 28C (nice) to 39C (too hot!). Hungary is so flat it makes Norfolk look hilly! We drove about 100 miles to our first hotel noting on the way white-tailed

eagle, and over 80 Marsh Harriers along with a huge variety of other species particularly herons, egrets and storks. From the hotel at Han Pescaresc we saw many birds; golden oriole, cuckoo, great reed warblers, stilts, woodpeckers and a great many other species. Whiskered terns were everywhere. A short distance away were some carp ponds, again rich in bird species including ferruginous duck, little bitterns, pygmy cormorants, hobbies, kestrel, black terns and little gull. A new bird for me was penduline tit, nesting like weavers in a hanging frond.

We travelled then to Sovata in Romania, quite different from Hungary with hills and mountains. We stopped at the Turda Gorge where golden eagles and alpine swifts were the highlights of many. The wild flowers were glorious and lots of butterflies. At Sovata with many pines, hornbeams and cherries there were hawfinches, crossbills, black redstarts, blackcaps, serins, marsh tits and of course woodpeckers, together with many, many more species. Sovata is a spa town with lakes and springs from the largely salt rock in this region. A new bird for me here was a grey headed woodpecker. One evening was a bear viewing trip. A few of us were taken to the top of a hill with a beautiful view all around us. Just sitting in this lovely place was great, the bears were an extra. We saw two bears and a wild sow with piglets. On the way back we saw tawny and little owls beside the track.

The next highlight was Becaz Gorge for wallcreepers that fluttered above the main road that passes through the mountains here. A very easy "difficult" bird! As we were up high there were ring ouzels and ravens. New species for the trip here were Mediterranean gulls, black headed gulls, black necked grebes, great crested grebes, ruffs, sandpipers, red footed falcons. The next stop was at a gigantic wader scrape where there were multiples of wood sandpipers, stilts, ruff, spotted redshanks, black tailed godwits, curlews, ringed plovers, lapwings, white storks, herons, egrets, gargany, teal, mallard and Caspian gulls. That was the up side; the high temperature was the down side. We retreated for a siesta.

After recovering, the next pond revealed white winged black terns and long legged buzzard. Next were bee-eaters and then out onto the plains where we came upon a flock of greylag geese together with a flock of common cranes and just beyond them great bustards. Going home late we saw night herons going out to feed and a short toed eagle. The next day was going home day, sorry, but happy with 152 species on the book.

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/

Winter Talks 2012/2013

Thursday 18th October 2012

Understanding how fragmented populations work water voles of Assynt – Chris Sutherland

Thursday 15th November 2012

The Birk, the Gorse & the Roden Tree – Are they moulding our landscape and wildlife more than we realise?– Drennan Watson

Thursday 17th January 2013

Ratcliffe re-visited: changes in upland plant communities of the Scottish Highlands since the 1950s – Dr Louise Ross

Thursday 21st February 2013

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels – the local perspective. Steve Willis Project Officer Northeast Scotland.

Thursday 21st March 2013

Honey Bees – Dr Ewan Campbell Aberdeen University

Thursday 18th April 2013

AGM then

Which species should I record & where should I send my records? Glenn Roberts NESBReC

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 runs a raffle at the winter meetings. Members kindly donate all the prizes, meaning that all the money raised goes 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

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