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**Chairman's Thoughts**

## SWT Aberdeen Newsletter Winter 2018

<http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/>



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I want to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thanks to Rose Toney who is leaving Aberdeen after 8 fantastic years as North East Scotland Biodiversity Co-ordinator and very valued committee member of the SWT Aberdeen City and Shire Group. Rose devoted enormous energies to supporting our local group. She organised the events programme, led wildlife outings, wrote numerous newsletter articles, including two in this newsletter, inspired through education projects and even served up teas!

Rose, with husband Nick, managed, protected and recorded biodiversity as convenor of the SWT reserve at Red Moss of Netherley, giving guided visits to everyone from local Primary Schools to international peatland scientists. She is a determined champion of Scottish wildlife, making a huge impact on wider public engagement in the North East of Scotland but also nationally through her innovations in camera trapping, which inspired the Scottish Natural Heritage national camera trapping project for schools. Rose has been an inspiration to young and old. She has kindled for very many a future interest in wildlife and nature and we have been proud to have someone like her as our committee member. We are very sad to see her heading for Cambridgeshire where Nick is already working but wish them all the best for the future.

**Roger Owen**

### **Caring for Wildlife and People in the Cairngorms National Park**

We are lucky in NE Scotland to have on our doorstep the magnificent Cairngorms National Park, and it's astonishing to think it is so big that it covers 2% of the land area of Great Britain. You will know as well as I that it has spectacular landscapes, as well as very special wildlife. I've just been reading the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan <https://cairngorms.co.uk/consultation/cnap18/> which will have just closed for comments by the time you see this. But it is worth looking at to see the 5-year plan to protect and improve habitat for wildlife and, at the same time, make it even more attractive to people working and visiting there.

For example, the Plan is to create 5000 ha of new woodland, including re-establishing the natural tree-line and encouraging more trees in gullies and steep slopes. Did you know there is a lot of degraded and eroding peatland in the Park, something like 70,000 ha? Over the next 5 years there is a plan to restore 5,000 ha of it by restoring the water table and encouraging only light burning for grouse moor management. 125 km of river will be restored with re-meandering and riparian woodland. Some of us wonder if this is enough, but it is a good start and will demonstrate how to restore effectively. The Plan also focuses on wildlife-friendly farming and proposes to enrol 20 farms in projects to increase wading birds through better wetland management. Hopefully, many more farms will follow suit. Interestingly, the Plan has a target to employ 50 volunteer rangers and to make sure at least 15,000 people will have



attended events educating about the importance of nature in the Park. Of course, there are some species in the Park that need specific effort to protect them as they are under various pressures. The Plan indicates there are 2 mammal species (wildcat and Mountain Hare), 2 birds (Capercaillie and Curlew), 12 invertebrates (including the Northern Silver Stiletto Fly) and 10 plants (including Alpine Blue Sow Thistle) that require special actions. Interestingly for us, encouragement and support are to be provided to involve more biological recorders and citizen-scientists..

The Plan also pledges to involve communities and other interested people more in land management decisions and to educate in the immense benefits everyone gets from healthy wildlife and diverse landscapes. Is all this enough? Is it a wise use of public money and resources? The Park Authority would like to know what you think!

**Roger Owen**

## The Community Woods in Maryculter, Aberdeenshire

There are many community woods, and each one is unique. This article is about our community wood. We purchased our local wood (67 ha) from the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) in 2016. We then implemented our own woodland management plan, written with the following points in mind:

- The remaining conifer stands have little current value, so we could never be a small, commercial version of FCS.
- Our proximity to various settlements, local schools, clubs and organisations encourages many visitors to the wood. They would all benefit from improved access to, and within, the wood.
- The large variation in soils, geology and topography have all helped create the current mix of habitats. The Crynoch Burn, part of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation, adds a further, riparian, habitat to the wood.
- Our wood already has over 200 species of plants and a wide range of animal species (including pine martens, red squirrels, bats, raptors, newts and badgers).
- Our community has a strong desire to protect the local environment, particularly after seeing the inevitable environmental losses arising from local housing development and the construction of the Aberdeen bypass.
- Our limited funds and a labour force, entirely comprised of volunteers, both increase the importance of working with nature to improve what is already there.

Put it all together, and the top priority was clearly to restore the wood to a mix of native habitats! An investigation of woodland types (National Vegetation Classification) and the pollen analysis of a bog core (both undertaken by Aberdeen University School of Biological Sciences) indicated that upland and wetland birch woodland would be suitable target habitats. Natural regeneration is prolific and is dominated by birch (which we want to keep) and sitka spruce (which we want to slowly remove). It takes the spruce in our area about 25 years before it dominates the canopy, so our felling so far has been a rescue mission: saving groups of birch trees by removing or thinning the interspersed spruce (see photo). For stands with little or no birch we have thinned the sitka by up to 30% to hopefully create space for birch regeneration. We have also planted 2,500 native trees just to help things along. The money raised from timber sales and from grants have now helped us repair and extend the forest roads and create new paths for visitors.



Open birch woodland 2 years after removal of sitka.  
Note birch regeneration in the foreground and planted trees in collars



The first thinning operations are now complete, so the next things on the list are restoring the wetland areas and expanding the small area of Scots Pine/ Ericoid Heath. The speed at which the woodland is recovering is breath-taking – a permanent source of the feel-good factor.

To visit the wood, the best place to park is the layby at NO862 991. Further information is on our website ([www.maryculterwoods.com](http://www.maryculterwoods.com)) or our Facebook page (Maryculter Woods). The Maryculter Woodlands Trust, SCIO: SC044224

**Ed Thorogood**

## A Wildlife Trip to Costa Rica, February 13<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> 2018

This trip was organised by Saga. Unlike normally where the Rep. belongs to a hotel, in Costa Rica the same Rep. (a Costa Rican named Heiner), accompanied us to all three hotels, and also on all the excursions, acting as guide. The first hotel was in San Jose, the capital, a typical very big tourist hotel not far from the centre, which was good, as traffic in San Jose is gridlocked most of the time. We visited sights of interest e.g. the National Museum, but I was more interested in their Butterfly House, which was exceptional. The hotel had gardens over which the Black Vultures soared, and a flock of Red-fronted Parakeets screamed in the trees. Vultures, Black and Turkey, were everywhere in Costa Rica. Rufous-collared Sparrow was a new bird for me.

We moved west towards the Pacific to Hotel Villa Lapas, a forest-lodge sort of hotel. I could have stayed there for a week or more as it was full of every type of wildlife. It was situated beside a rocky river, the Rio Tarcolitas, in deep jungle. It was heaven! As we arrived a Basilisk Lizard sunned itself beside the pool. What an extravagant ridged back. Scarlet Macaws flew overhead. In the evening when we took our medicine, flocks of Glossy and White Ibis came to roost in the river beside us, as well as the ever-present Spotted Sandpipers. Tiger Herons nested above the open-sided dining room and a Black-mandibled Toucan stood watch above the entrance. Hummingbirds were everywhere. We saw a nest the size of a golf ball with one little chick sprawled half outside panting in the heat.



**Basilisk Lizard**

We visited the Manuel Antonio National Park on a jungle walk where we saw Two and Three-toed Sloth, several varieties of Monkey and Iguanas. New birds were Great Tinamou and Scaly-throated Leaf Tosser, which was, of course, tossing leaves. We ended up at the end of the trail at a typical Pacific golden sand beach where a few holiday makers lounged on the beach and swam. Their belongings were under constant attack from White-tailed Colobus Monkeys and Racoons. Carara National Park was next where we enjoyed aerial tram rides through the trees below and then above the canopy.



**Scaly throated leaf tosser**

The next day we went to Turu Ban Ri National Park for a wander and then a river trip down the Rio Tarcoles, to the estuary at the Pacific. A special bird for me was Sun Grebe. Whimbrel added a touch of home. At the mouth were flocks of Brown Pelicans and Frigatebirds. We viewed an enormous crocodile over 5 m in length, but it was the girth that astounded me - it was huge. It is known as "the mother of the river". We travelled on to the Muelle de San Carlos in the north of the country, the plains area. It appeared more wooded than it actually was because all the fence posts sprout into trees, so the fields are surrounded with a rectangle of foliage. A lot of forest or jungle in Costa Rica has long ago been stripped and burnt to allow agriculture. Coffee in the centre, pineapples in the west, to the east bananas and in the north livestock. Jungle only exists in the national parks or in small groups often called "gardens". Bear in mind I have only seen part of Costa Rica.

The hotel here was a smart version of Villa Lapas in brick and stone. It had huge grounds that were good for bird and iguana watching. Another river trip here on the Rio Penas Blancas, but this time in little rubber dinghies, five to a "boat" plus a "crewman". I think the chaps enjoyed it as much as the tourists, it was enormous fun. The river was full of snags. I remember a fluorescent green Basilisk Lizard and a landing at a local cottage for coffee. Costa Rica has some great coffee! The cottage garden was full of humming birds sipping the blossoms.



**Zeledon's Black Antbird**

I took a break the next day and prowled around the gardens. The low point of the day was being pooped on from a great height by an Iguana. Luckily, they produce a fairly solid "jobbie", and I was wearing my big sunhat. These iguanas can be huge, over five feet, and how they manage to climb biggest of trees, and why they do it, is a mystery to me. They sometimes fall, and this happened to us the following day on a forest walk; we jumped a mile when this whopper came crashing down beside us. It just wandered off, not bothered at all. A day of visiting a market garden and having a Costa Rican lunch of rice and pinto beans and a variety of vegetables I have never heard of and the inevitable Tilapia. Don't go to CR for the food! Go for the fruit though, yummy. Time to think about going back to San Jose, via a garden, zoo and a waterfall walk. A good bird here though, Zeledon's Black Antbird.

I have only mentioned a few birds here, we saw many more. There are 932 to choose from. The last hotel fed the birds at breakfast time, which gave everyone views of the Scarlet and Blue Grey Tanagers and Euphonias which tucked into the fruit. Like-wise with animals - some I'd never heard of, Coati, for example, a furry beast, the shape of a lemur in a beaver-lamb coat with that glorious upright tail and a little white face. I met one at the second hotel. Apparently, he goes through the bins at night!

My memory of Costa Rica is of green forest and brown rivers. Blue skies and hot temperatures, just nice 34C. Nice people, tourism is big business in CR. We were told to avoid coming when the liners were in, they swamp the attractions. There are no seasons, just wet and dry. Do pick the dry time for your visit.

**Rodney Payne**



**Coati**

## Water Shrew Watch

Have you ever seen a Water Shrew? They are the most distinctively marked small mammal in Scotland but are seldom actually seen in the flesh. Inhabiting wet places, they are vulnerable to changes in water quality and to pollution and, with a voracious appetite (they eat around 50% of their body weight each day), need ready availability of food items. Water Shrews are predators, mainly of invertebrates, but they also have a secret weapon to enable them to take larger items; poisonous saliva that enables them to incapacitate prey items, such as fish, amphibians, and small mice.



Until recently, they were thought to quite uncommon in North East Scotland and only a handful of records was held by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBREc). However, fieldwork and collation of older records for the *Atlas of Mammals of North-East Scotland and the Cairngorms* (published last year) did reveal a wide, if sparse, scatter of reports.



The problem with recording Water Shrews is, of course, that they are secretive. They inhabit wetlands of almost any kind, from small burns and ponds through to the edge of lochs and gravel pits, and can occasionally be found well away from water. But they usually stick closely to cover, feeding among dense emergent vegetation and vanishing at the first sign of threat, so casual sightings are very infrequent.

Our knowledge of their distribution has leapt forward in recent years, thanks to camera trap technology. Although camera traps are generally designed for larger animals, with a few modifications, this can be used as a highly successful method of establishing the presence of Water Shrews. Last year, two University of Aberdeen students, supported by the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership, used camera traps to survey 60 wetland sites across

the North East and found Water Shrews in 20% of them. This year, Water Shrew Watch, a Citizen Science project, has been launched and already, there are records from a further six new sites in the region. If you see one, either this year or beyond, please do report it to NESBREc. And if you have a camera trap, why not try to see if there are Water Shrews living in your local pond or burn?

**Rose Toney**

## The Wild North East – Scotland's Natural Gem.... (Why We Care)

In April, a short film entitled, *The Wild North East – Scotland's Natural Gem*, was launched at The James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen in front of more than one hundred guests including MSPs and their families, Councillors, research and conservation staff, community groups and young people. The film was produced on behalf of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership by Scotland: The Big Picture, a media organisation known for its striking visual imagery and emotive messages about the natural world.

The film highlights some of the most spectacular and iconic biodiversity that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors to North East Scotland, from majestic Golden Eagles gliding across montane landscapes to playful Bottlenose Dolphins splashing around in Aberdeen Harbour. The imagery is undoubtedly breathtaking, akin to wildlife programmes currently so popular on television.

However, is this just gloss, depicting a utopian world that doesn't exist? Where is the habitat fragmentation, the species decline and wildlife persecution? Is this a misleading picture that perpetuates



**Pine Marten - Scotland: The Big Picture**



### Puffin - Scotland: The Big Picture

brings me to the point of the film. As a conservationist, I believe the biggest challenge we face is making people care, care enough to make a change, care enough to act; from making space for wildlife in our gardens (or on windowsills) to contacting government on key issues, pressuring them to make a change.

I don't think anyone who watches the film, which has now amassed more than 170,000 views, can fail to be impressed (and perhaps feel a sense of pride and place) at the beautiful world we live in, and of the wildlife on our doorstep, which is why I have subtitled it, "Why We Care". But will it inspire you, make you care enough, to make a change?

The video can be viewed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4owglBdMx3U&feature=youtu.be>

**Rose Toney**

### The Malloch Society of Scottish Dipterists

It was way back in the summer of 1988 that I and a group of like-minded dipterists founded the Malloch Society, under the guidance of our leader, Dr. Graham Rotheray. We were attending the Scottish Entomologists Gathering on the Black Isle on a weekend field meeting gathering records of various insect groups. While there, Iain Macgowan of SNH suggested we go up to Anancuan, the SNH field centre near Loch Maree to do some collecting in that area. We stayed in the field centre and had our evening meals in the Kinlochewe Hotel. While there, it was suggested that since we were all interested in recording and collecting flies we should form a group to study Scottish Diptera. Various names were suggested as to what we should call our group. Percy Grimshaw, the keeper of Entomology at the Royal Scottish Museum, in Edinburgh at the beginning of the 1900s would be a good candidate to honour by using his name for our society. Someone said Grimshaw did not sound very Scottish. It was Geoff Hancock of Glasgow Hunterian Museum who suggested John Russell Malloch, who collected diptera around Bonhill at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, might be more appropriate. So, it was agreed to call ourselves The Malloch Society.

John Russell Malloch (1875 – 1963) was born to John Malloch and Margaret Stirling at Milton of Campsie in Stirlingshire. All the family worked in the local textile mill. By 1897 Malloch Jr. already had an interest in diptera and other insect groups. Although he had no formal university education he was soon publishing articles on entomology in scientific publications. His collections of insects can still be seen in the collections of The Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, the Glasgow Museum and also The Hope Department, Oxford University. In 1910 Malloch emigrated to the USA where he gained employment as a professional entomologist and started out on a career which was to have profound effect on Diptera research throughout the world. He named some 3200 species new to science from not only America but also from Australia and Europe.

In honour of his contribution to Diptera science, the modern Malloch Society was founded by 8 dipterists who carry out ecological research work to determine the breeding habitats of rare species of flies in Scotland. Our research initially concentrated on finding the breeding sites of 3 of Scotland's rarest and unique saproxylic Scottish hoverfly fauna, namely *Callicera rufa*, a pinewood specialist, *Hammerschmidtia ferruginea*, the Aspen Hoverfly and the very rare *Blera fallax*, another pinewood specialist. So far, over the past 30 years, we have found all 3 species and determined their breeding site & ecological requirements to conserve the species. This initial work has been used by other groups like Trees for Life and The Zoological Society of Scotland to set up breeding programs of *Blera fallax*, so that their offspring can be released back into the wild. Trees for Life have a programme of raising Aspen trees for transplanting out in the Speyside woods.



**Scottish Hoverfly**



**Aspen Hoverfly**

The Malloch society enjoys a spring and summer of meeting for weekend fieldwork at many sites throughout Scotland, and in November, we have our annual Malloch Society AGM, with talks by our members and invited guests, followed by our annual Dinner and presentation of the DOTY Award (Dipterist of the Year). The society has also been pleased to accept the prestigious Marsh Award (which is run in partnership with the Royal Entomological Society), for its original research on Diptera. In 2011 the society organised the biannual International Syrphidae Conference, was held in Glasgow, to which over 100 participants took part.

We have also expanded our research work abroad and at the bequest of various international dipterists visited their countries to study their Diptera fauna. Countries include Finland, France, Russia, Greece & Spain.

A further flavour of what the Malloch Society does can be found on our website [www.mallochsociety.org.uk](http://www.mallochsociety.org.uk)

**Kenneth Watt**

### Indoor talks for 2018/2019

Indoor meetings take place at Main Lecture Theatre, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Tillydrone Ave, AB24 2TZ at 7.30 pm.

#### 2018

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> Oct.** Wildlife on my doorstep.

Bob Smith

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> Nov:** In Search of the Striped Rabbit of Vietnam. Sarah Woodfin

#### 2019

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> Jan:** Weird, wonderful and colourful – life below the surface of the North Sea. Sarah Gosden

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Feb:** Rare Invertebrates of the Cairngorms. Gabrielle Finn

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Mar:** Control of Giant Hogweed. Calum Hislop

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> Apr:** AGM then: Scottish Wildlife Trust: championing, demonstrating & inspiring. Bruce Wilson

Local SWT website: [www.swtaberdeen.org.uk](http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk)

National SWT website:

<http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

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