

SWT Aberdeen Newsletter Winter 2014

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

Chairman's News

BBC news reported this month (July) on research which showed indisputable evidence of the link between neonicotinoid pesticides and the drastic decline of bees and other insects in the UK and in other countries around the world. So its disturbing that the UK government has opposed the ban on these pesticides proposed by the EU on the basis that control of insect pests is needed to protect crops. In the longer term there will be severe damage to farmer's incomes if there are no free pollination services provided by bees! In fact, SWT has pointed out this huge and building problem recently in a policy statement on pesticide use in Scotland and the UK. Let's hope governments start listening.

On a really positive note I am pleased to let you know that we have a new committee member. Alan Belton is already one of the leaders of the Stonehaven Watch Group and he has very kindly agreed to join the Member Centre Committee and to share his experience and ideas to help us provide great wildlife experiences through our programme of activities. We still need more help with the committee though so please let me know if you would like to volunteer. My email address is: roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk

Roger Owen – Chair Aberdeen Members Centre

Update From Reserves Manager to Aberdeen July 2014

Red Moss of Netherley

We now have 25 year management agreements in place with **two** landowners within the SSSI bringing a further 16Ha within SWT management. I am corresponding with a third, landowner's lawyers over the sale of a further 15Ha. Team from Dundee have strimmed the path and completed work inserting further dams on SWT land. This is work funded by SRDP.

We have verbal confirmation of further funding which will allow us to carry out further damming and scrub clearance work on the "new" section of the reserve. This work will be carried out by contractors

Nick and Rose, as always are doing an excellent job as Convenors and continue to find new species for the reserve

Coulnacraig Meadow

The meadow is due to be cut and raked at the end of August by the team from Dundee

Gight Wood

Our contractor continues to carry out footpath maintenance, and there is a small budget for further non native tree felling work this winter. Unfortunately we did not get a budget to continue bracken control. We received a request from the local Angling Club to mow a path on the SWT owned northern side of the river which we refused. This area is currently quite inaccessible and we wanted to keep this part of the reserve that way, to allow the wildlife an undisturbed area. Ealasaid and Dr Mark Young continue to patrol the reserve and report back to me any issues

Longhaven Cliffs

Again our contractor is continuing our footpath maintenance work for the year.

Unfortunately we have been the victim of further vandalism on this site. This time someone has ripped off a section of handrail. Our contractor is going to repair this. It seems a long way for someone to go to vandalise things?

As always I am happy to answer any questions. It is easiest to contact me at rpotter@swt.org.uk

Rab

Reserves Manager North East

NESBReC Mammal Atlas project update

What a first year for the Mammal Atlas project. At the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre we have been overwhelmed by the support and enthusiasm for the project. We want to thank all our regular recorders for getting involved plus a huge welcome to all our new recorders. It has been a highlight of the project so far that through this project we have introduced so many new people to the wonderful world of biological recording. From small mammal training courses to press releases on: 'Look what your Cat Brought In' [1] and Road Kill [2] it has certainly been a busy year. We have also had great fun visiting schools, groups and talking at and attending events such as TechFest and Aberdeenshire Library Summer Reading Challenge Award Ceremony.

[1]<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-24061902>

[2] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-24490362>

We started the project December 2013 with 31,983 records and we now have 37,565 records so thank you everyone who has submitted their records so far. We are sure this figure can be added to soon, because many of you have not yet submitted your records. We have seen large increases in the records of certain species such as the Pine Marten where the number of records has more than doubled; this reflects the increased abundance and distribution of this species in the North East but also illustrates how the uptake of camera trapping can be effective in gathering information on more nocturnal species. As a result of our 'Look what your Cat Brought in' campaign and associated training courses we have seen an increase in the records of many small mammals, e.g. a 45% increase in Wood Mouse records. Also, many of our 'common' species that were under-recorded have also seen an increase, such as moles, foxes and rabbits.

Thanks to everyone who has adopted a square in the "Adopt A 10km Square" Initiative. We hope you have had fun getting out and about recording in an area close to you or discovering a whole new area. If you have not yet submitted your records please can we ask you to do so in the near future so we can assess progress. If you have any questions about recording for your square please do get in touch with us at mammals@nesbrec.org.uk There are a number of 10km squares still looking to be adopted as you can see on the map at the link below:

<http://www.ereca.org.uk/mammal/atlas.aspx?area=nesbrec&records=false>

If you use Internet Explorer please use <http://www.nesbrec.org.uk/modules/mammals2/>

Unsurprisingly, many of the upland 10km squares have not yet been adopted, so if you fancy a walk in the hills or an excuse to visit and record in a different area then please get in touch. It is not a huge time commitment and we really need your help to make this work. There is still the rest of 2014 and the first half of 2015 to participate in this strand of the survey and to get any records to us.

Annie Robinson

Smallest of the Big 5



Tiny it may be, but the Small Blue makes up for its size by possessing oodles of charm. Inhabiting coastal cliff-top grassland and flower-rich areas on disturbed land, such as sand dunes, this delicate beauty is one of our most special butterflies. Although probably never ubiquitous, Small Blues were certainly more widespread in North East Scotland a few decades ago than they currently are. Colonies at Cove and along the Deeside Way, near Cults, have certainly been lost. The species may also have now gone from a former stronghold at St. Cyrus at the very southern part of the Aberdeenshire coast. Only along the North Aberdeenshire and Moray coast do strong colonies of Small Blues persist and even, at favoured sites, continue to thrive.

The inconspicuous nature of Small Blues, and their dependency on sunny weather to fly, means that organising or attending an event aimed at observing the species is either an act of extreme optimism or foolhardiness. Nonetheless, 20 brave souls signed up for a Small Blue training day at the beginning of June 2013 to learn more about, and hopefully see, the species. The event was organised by the North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership in conjunction with Butterfly Conservation Scotland. Duncan Davidson, of the Society's East Scotland branch, joined the group of prospective surveyors at Cullen Town Hall to describe the habits and haunts of Small Blues. We learned how the Small Blue relies on a single larval foodplant, Kidney Vetch, with eggs being laid upon the flowers and larvae feeding first on the anthers and then on developing seeds. We also learned that despite its delicate appearance, the species has a dark side; if two larvae enter the same floret, a fight to the death will ensue.

After the indoor session, a trip to the site of a Small Blue colony was planned to observe the habitat used. At that point, as if the Butterfly Gods were looking down upon us, the clouds rolled back and the sun emerged and shone brightly. Although still very early in the flight season, it wasn't long before one of the participants set off in pursuit of a likely candidate with a butterfly net. Once the insect was secured, we were all able to marvel at a Small Blue in the flesh. For most of us this was our first direct encounter with the species. Over the next couple of hours, several dozen more were seen, photographed and closely examined. The event had been a resounding success and had far exceeded any realistic expectations in terms of what we might see.

As well as celebrating this wonderful butterfly, the event had a serious purpose. We are keen that as many former sites as possible for Small Blues are checked for continued presence of the species, along with other possible new sites. Given the liking for disturbed ground, Small Blue colonies are sometimes ephemeral with the species forming new colonies where suitable habitat and, crucially, foodplant resources appear. With better knowledge of the distribution of Small Blues we hope to be able to instigate or encourage conservation actions to help this declining species. To further raise its profile, the Small Blue was designated one of the North East Big 5, a group of species

chosen to highlight special local species and biodiversity projects throughout 2013's Year of Natural Scotland celebrations.

We will continue to work with Butterfly Conservation Scotland to try to ensure the survival of this species in North East Scotland. You can help by assisting with dedicated surveys to map the range of the species in the region. Please contact rose.toney@hutton.ac.uk for details. After all, what better way can there be to spend the early summer days than visiting some of our most dramatic coastal sites in the sunshine looking out for these beautiful butterflies?
Rose Toney (North East Scotland Biodiversity Co-ordinator) Photo by Keith Warmington

Further Wildlife at Work

My previous articles about wildlife at work were based on the Science and Technology Park at Balgownie. Unfortunately the company I worked for went under last year and I had to seek work in pastures new. For a few months I was a technician at Torry Academy, not the most wildlife friendly of sites but close to Girdleness. The highlight was probably seeing a Woodcock being blown past my window one stormy morning. Also when it rained, which it did a lot last year, the playground would flood and a pair of Grey Wagtails would appear and patrol the edge of the water looking for food. In total I saw 16 species of birds in the seven months I was there. The section of playground I looked out over had been shut off to pupils for years and a lot of vegetation was establishing itself in the soil which was forming and accumulating in places. You could see a succession from pioneering mosses up to 2m sycamore saplings. The most interesting wildlife was seen on my journey to and from the school, via the old Deeside rail line. I regularly counted singing/calling Robins along my route. Observing how the high numbers in autumn declined as the winter advanced, and birds disappeared from more marginal territories. More subtle changes related to weather and daylight and generally I observed that gardens had more birds in them than the less 'populated' spaces such as Allenvale Cemetery and Duthie Park. My most memorable encounter occurred on the old suspension bridge one December morning when a fox was also using the bridge to cross the Dee in the opposite direction. There were several people on the bridge but the fox was unconcerned and just trotted over at a steady pace.

In January this year I started working for an engineering company in Altens. My first wildlife impressions were not favourable on that first day. Lots of modern metal clad factories, busy roads full of heavy lorries, lots of tarmac and concrete with very little greenery in sight. First impressions can be deceptive. Our premises overlook the fields at Doonies Farm and of course the sea. Now after almost a year there I have seen 32 species of birds from our site, all naked eye sightings except for Sanderling. These were a group of about 20 sheltering 'inland' on a vacant site at the end of the estate during the storms last month. Other notable sightings have included four Kestrels over the yard at the same time back in March and the number of Buzzards I see. I have been surprised by how many Greenfinches are round the estate given the lack of vegetation. Unsurprisingly mammal sightings are in short supply, just one to be precise. A young Grey Squirrel ran across the road outside our building, looking very out of place as there are no trees for a considerable distance in any direction. However the biggest revelation was the number of orchids which appeared in verges and banks on the industrial estate in May and June. In total I counted over 200 spikes of Northern Marsh Orchid, presumably survivors hanging on from the original vegetation before the concrete and steel arrived. Unfortunately the ones growing in verges of buildings tended to get mown before they set seed. But there are enough growing in wilder corners to keep the species going in Altens. One morning a male Common Blue was nectaring on an orchid, a sight to make my long walk to work worthwhile. My walk to work isn't as pleasant now as it is all along roads. I still count Robin territories and can report that this year numbers halved from their peak to a stable figure in December. Crossing the Dee consistently gives me the most interesting sightings, including watching hunting Goosanders from above, seeing a very late Mallard brood and the always entertaining Dippers. As I write this at lunchtime a Song Thrush is singing loudly from the top of a gantry in the very noisy container yard below our site, a small example of nature still being ascendant in the modern human world. Leading me to ponder what further sightings I might have at my place of work next year.
Gavin Forrest

Raffle Prizes

The members centre runs a raffle at the winter meetings. Members kindly donate all the prizes, meaning that all the money raised goes to member centre funds. So if anyone would like to donate items for prizes for meetings this Autumn they will be greatly appreciated. Please hand them to any committee member if you have any suitable items.

RSPB Friends of Strathbeg – Bird Food Sales

Latest prices and orders forms will be available to download from the SWT website: www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/

Planning Volunteers Day

The annual Planning Volunteers Day will this year be held on the 3rd of December in the offices of Architecture and Design Scotland (Bakehouse Close, 146 Canongate, Edinburgh). All planning volunteers and members with an interest in responding to planning related issues in their local area are very welcome to attend. A booking form will be

sent in due course but expressions of early interest would be most welcome. Please respond to Bruce Wilson bwilson@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk .

Indoor talks and outings for 2014/2015

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.

Thursday 20th Nov 2014: Weird, Wonderful and Colourful- Marine life of the North Sea- Sarah Gosden Buchan Ranger

Thursday 15th Jan 2015: Butterflies and moths of the NE of Scotland - Helen Rowe (Aberdeenshire Council).

Thursday 19th Feb 2015: Introduction to Bee Keeping - Rosie Crighton Aberdeen and District Beekeepers Association

Thursday 19th Mar 2015: River Dee and its wildlife - Joanna Dick, Dee Catchment Outreach Officer

Thursday 16th Apr 2015: AGM then Educating for the Environment, Marie Fish Aberdeen Biodiversity Centre.

Outings

May date TBC

Red Moss of Netherley with Reserve Conveners Meet at layby on Netherley-Cookney Road NO858933. Packed lunch & Wellington boots recommended (walking stick optional). Booking essential: Roger Owen 01569 762479

29-31st May 2015

May Festival-Aberdeen University
SWT will have a stand
An all-encompassing arts and science festival
For more information go to:
<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mayfestival/>

June 2015 – Date & Location TBC

Botanical Outing with David Welch
Packed lunch and stout footwear
Booking essential
Further details and booking contact: David Elston
01224 868153

Saturday 18th July 2015 10.00-15.00

Wildlife of the River Dee 1-4pm – with Joanna Dick
Location to be confirmed
Packed lunch and stout footwear
Booking essential
Further details and booking contact: Rodney Payne
01569 763742

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Local SWT website: www.swtaberdeen.org.uk
National SWT website: <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

