

# **DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

## **ANNUAL BULLETIN No 33**

### **2008**

|                                          |                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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#### **CONTENTS**

|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Society Reports:      | Page 2  |
| Obituaries:           | Page 4  |
| Winter Meetings 2008: | Page 5  |
| Summer Outings 2008:  | Page 11 |
| Autumn Meetings 2008: | Page 20 |
| Members' Articles:    | Page 26 |

The Bulletin cover illustration is by Leonore Goodliffe (née Fullerton) and shows a selection of our area's alpine plants, including the Society's emblem, the dwarf cornel. Other illustrations are by Anne Reid, Jim Cook, Alban Houghton, Mary Reid, Christine Reid, Margaret Palin, Leonore Goodliffe and Artfile.

#### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

Thanks to all members who have submitted articles and reports; it makes Bulletin production much easier, though there is always space for contributions from new authors. Thanks to Mary Reid for typing and other computing help, and to Jim Cook, Colin Reid and the girls for proof reading and helpful comments (Mary and Christine via e-mail again this year!).

Contributions for the next Bulletin, both articles and line drawings, are always welcome and may be submitted at any time during the year. Handwritten, typed or e-mailed contributions are all equally acceptable

Anne Reid

## SOCIETY REPORTS

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am now near the end of my first year as president and can report an enjoyable year to date. We were pleased to elect Bob McLeod as an honorary member, in appreciation of all his years of support for the DNS and his pioneering work with the Dundee Tree Group. Sadly, this year we record the death of members Nancy Middleton and Owen Edwards and past member Mamie Dryburgh (see Obituaries, page 4).

Our members remain active and enthusiastic, although numbers have fallen a little. Many of us are retired but we have also been pleased to welcome some younger members recently.

We have been perhaps a little slow to adopt new technology, but we are now making increased use of e-mail. The new data projection systems at the University have been a bit of a challenge to some of us (and to me in particular), but fortunately some Council members are getting to grips with the technology. A subgroup of council is setting up a society website, so important in the current age.

Our events programme has been full and varied, with 28 outings, lectures and gatherings on the cards and others informally arranged. The six coach outings are always popular, although we need to keep costs under review. We have come to split our parties into two on most larger outings with a longer and a shorter walk. This has many advantages, but increases the work of the leaders. The weekend at Oban was well supported and very successful.

The indoor meetings have been well attended, varied and enjoyable. We have tended to follow the same pattern of activities as in recent years, but suggestions for changes are always welcome. We are a general natural history society so we aim for a broad range of topics - proposals for lecture topics, speakers and outings are always welcome and helpful.

There are also various other activities to report, including work on our reserve at Carsegowniemuir led by Jim Cook and stalls at the Dundee Flower Show and at Carnoustie. The Bulletin, edited by Anne Reid, is valuable and well produced.

I am grateful to the members of Council for all their support and tolerance of my frequent absences in Easter Ross. Anne Reid as Vice-President has given me enormous help over the year and we are very pleased to welcome back Brian Allan as the second Vice-President. Thanks also to Alex Rollo, Secretary; Dorothy Fyffe, Treasurer; Margaret McLaren, Membership Secretary; Davie Stein, Excursions Secretary; Jim Cook, Technical Convenor; and to all Council members for their work for the Society. This year we are pleased to welcome Kim Eberst and David Lampard to the Council and thank John Campbell and Jack Moody who reached the end of their term of office.

We are now engaged in finalising next summer's outings and planning next winter's talks and look forward to another good year.

Brian Ballinger

### TECHNICAL CONVENOR'S REPORT

The weather has been rather mixed up this year and affected several of the outings in the spring. It was a rather cool evening on 6th May when we visited the ponds in Caird Park to monitor the effects of the recent dredging. I'm pleased to report that John Whyman seems to have done a good job in controlling the JCBs and it appears that the ponds will probably recover quite quickly from the damage. Apart from having to fend off the attention of some rather too-enthusiastic young lads, the first of the unofficial excursions went very well. However, on 20th May the joint meeting with the Dundee Group of the SWT at Stannergate attracted only a small group of members, perhaps put off by the bone-chilling winds off the Tay (they felt more Siberian!). However, we found an excellent array of plants and animals and were able to confirm the presence of most of the expected species. (We were probably too late for the **shepherd's cress**, *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, on its usual site on the tiny rocky

outcrop right beside the crest of the path.) Most species seemed to have survived the recent path improvements and the increased cycle traffic.

The next unofficial outing, along the shore path from Balmerino towards Wormit, on 27th May, was reasonably well attended. This trip complemented the outing in 2007 from the other end of the path at Wormit. Again, we turned up most of the usual expected species but were greatly rewarded with a good display of the hybrid **primroses** (*Primula vulgaris* x *veris*) in the community woodland area on the bank above the path. Your Society had been consulted about the planting by the developers during the mid-1990s and we advised that the area around these **primroses** should remain open. I'm pleased to say that they acted on the advice and the plants are doing well. However, some light grazing would be in order, once the trees have grown up a little further, to help clear some of the coarse vegetation on the bank. The Tayport foreshore and saltmarsh outing on 3rd June also proved to be very interesting, although it attracted only a limited number of keen members. We recorded a considerable number of the birds, plants and invertebrates to be expected in such habitats.

The final unofficial organised survey evening of the season took place on 10th June to Balgay Park, starting from the north entrance. This outing was a repeat of the wash-out last year and we were able to spend a short time admiring the restoration work on the old bridge between the two hills. I'm pleased to report that the weather in 2008 was vastly improved, although rather breezy and chilly at times, and the rather sparse group was able to record a large number of species of trees and other plants and birds. None, however, were of especial interest. Still, it was a pleasant evening.

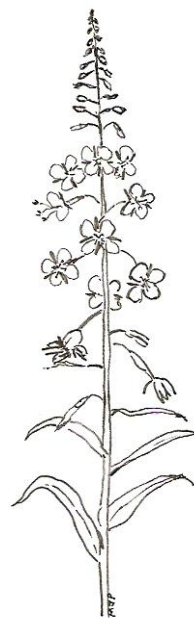
Jim Cook

## CARSEGOWNIEMUIR REPORT

The quarry, I'm pleased to report in this rather wet and miserable year, is thriving. The weather may not have been the best for many animals - insects, nesting birds, small mammals and us - but it has been ideal for growing trees. Not surprisingly, no trees have died from lack of water, although a few did become rather dry early in the year. On the whole, the growth of well-established young trees was very strong, many putting on over a metre in height. This greatly decreases the work load for the future because experience has taught us that, once they are taller than the **willowherb**, the young trees are much more likely to survive the intense competition. Although the quarry was exposed to the usual spate of gales, no damage was done apart from the loss of several boughs from the population of old trees. No more **elm** trees succumbed to Dutch elm disease this past year and all trees were well-enough protected in the mild weather of last winter to suffer no ill-effects due to **rabbit** damage.

The usual activities proceeded apace. In the early spring another six trees were planted and then, in the early summer, several days were spent clearing **willowherb** from around the youngest trees and mulching them with the pulled plants. In late summer a day or two was spent at the usual job of pulling the **ragwort** before it set seed. However, the greatest change was the large-scale use of the motor brasher to clear the paths. Although noisy in use, the machine has proved a great boon. In only two man-days of work, we were able to clear all the paths of encroaching willowherb throughout the quarry, including some that we usually don't open up. In previous years this task has taken four or five days of effort by hand. All paths were cleared to at least a 2-metre standard and all main paths were opened up to 3-metre or even 4-metre width, which means that even after a windy period the willowherb will not have collapsed across the space and the paths will remain open in wet weather.

This left more time for more useful activities and, in the autumn, a total of 15 holes were dug ready to receive new trees. A large number of wire tubes were prepared as well.



Then in early winter a dozen large **ash** and **birch** tree seedlings were planted, roughly six more than usual. The ash trees had been donated three years ago by Ronnie Young from a host of small and spindly specimens found clinging to life behind his garage. They were planted out in good ground in sunny conditions and most have grown and developed well, ready for planting back in the quarry. Another 15 are due for planting in the coming year.

The other developments worth reporting are that a **ferret** group from Falkirk has visited twice and helped clear **rabbits** from two areas, although other parts still harbour far too many. Lorraine and Ronnie have reported that myxomatosis has reappeared again and may help in controlling the problem. In all, in this year of gloom, both financial and meteorological, it has been a most successful year in the quarry.

Jim Cook

## FLOWER SHOW

The other major event of the year was the stand that we mounted and manned (and womanned) at the Flower Show in early September. The stand was set up on the Thursday evening in co-operation with the Dundee Group of the SWT but we found that the space allocated was much more restricted than normal. In fact, unlike in previous years when we had been able to expand almost at will because of the lack of competition, this time we were hemmed in by a number of other keen stand-holders. The main decision on the Thursday evening was not to enter the stand for judging since the boards were looking a little the worse for wear and the displays were not fully developed before the Saturday morning. The highlight, by far, was the excellent display of freshly-collected **fungi** put on by Gordon and Davie. This proved a great attraction to passing crowds on the Saturday and Sunday, although latterly the specimens were starting to dry out and droop somewhat. Brian, Jean, Margaret, David and Kim, amongst others, all put in a power of work and contributed greatly to the success of the venture. Sharing the space with the SWT group also proved a bonus since we share a number of members and they contributed as well - and also Tom and Mary Harwood always prove a draw in themselves. The **nest** (of a **goldcrest**, perhaps) was a great discussion item for many of the passing crowds.

Although very few visitors were attracted to sign up there and then as members, we feel that such events help 'raise the profile' of the Society and generally are 'a good thing'. Two points remain to be made. On one of my wanders around the other stands to take in the sights, I was impressed by the standard set by some of them and the displays that had been arranged. We need to borrow, obtain a long-term loan of, buy (?) or otherwise acquire a new set of stands. The current set are rather past their sell-by date (and thank-you very much Brian, we've made very good use of them over the years). We also need to re-do all the displays, particularly to bring in a number of live plants and spectacular natural history specimens. The other point of note is that one of the organisers reported that bookings for future shows were only likely to increase and there would be no chance of us being able to spread out in the years to come.

Jim Cook

Note: Dundee Museum, through David Lampard, has kindly donated their old display boards which are a great improvement on our old ones, especially after minor renovations. Ed.

## OBITUARIES

### MAMIE DRYBURGH

It was with great sadness that we heard one of our oldest members had died at the ripe old age of 96. Mary Dryburgh, known to us all as Mamie, passed away in early March 2008. She was part of an indomitable double act with her friend Marion Seymour, both from Ceres in Fife. Mamie was a regular on most of our summer outings and spring weekends during the 70s, 80s and 90s.

One anecdote, which I related at our AGM, sums up Mamie's drive and determination. On a trip to the Falls of Damff and Unich at the head of Glen Esk, we had followed the path up the falls and arrived at the point where we had to cross the river to rejoin the path on the Shank of Inchgrundle. There was a large stone in the middle of the stream which most of us found, with a little help, fairly easy to cross. Mamie and Marion had different ideas. They chose to go further up river to seek out an 'easier' option. When they had reached a point when the water looked flat and shallow, the duo removed their boots, rolled up their trousers and proceeded to ford the river. However it was much deeper than they had anticipated and they both found themselves waist deep before they reached the safety of the far bank. Typically they were unfazed by this and by the time we had reached the Retreat for tea they had dried off and were happy to talk about their adventure.

Although latterly unable to attend our outings, Mamie will always be remembered for her dedication to and love of nature. She was a very competent botanist and always keen to learn. She would list all the plants she had seen on out trips and looked them up at home to more fully appreciate their beauty. She was a lovely, generous lady who will be sadly missed.

Brian Allan

#### NANCY MIDDLETON

Nancy died in Ninewells Hospital on 2nd June 2008. She had done her training at DRI, then moved to Canada and worked there as a radiographer for over 20 years. Her interests in natural history ranged widely but with an emphasis on bird life and she had been a member of the Nats for over ten years. Nancy returned to holiday in Canada on a regular basis and travelled widely in that country until, in her latter years, her illness curtailed these visits. Nevertheless, she still regularly attended Nats outings and her cheery personality gained her many friends within the Society. The youngest of seven of a family, she will be sorely missed by all who knew her. A generous bequest was left by her to the Society and a rowan tree has been planted in her memory.

Gordon Maxwell

#### OWEN EDWARDS

It is with great sadness that we record the death of Owen Edwards in July 2008. Owen and Monica moved to Invergowrie in 1998, to be near family, and joined the Nats the following year. They attended regularly, mainly at the winter lectures, and were well known to everyone. Owen took over the running of the local RSPB group in 2002, when it was in danger of collapse, and was President for three years. He was also Vice President of the Caledonian Hill Walking Club for several years, helping out in a number of ways. Owen will be widely missed, and we extend our sympathy to Monica and family.

Anne Reid

## WINTER MEETINGS

### CARNOUSTIE BARBECUE

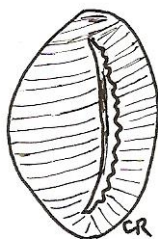
2nd January

2008 had dawned wet and windy and this looked like continuing well into its second day. The forecast gave hope of 'drier later' but no mention of it actually being dry, so at 10am the whole Reid family set off for Carnoustie with a determination to beat the elements. When we arrived at Dorothy Fyffe's house it soon became apparent that everyone else had also decided that they also would not be beaten by the weather - there were already over 20 Nats squeezed into Dorothy's front room with folding garden chairs supplementing the regular

furniture. Brian and Jenny ladled out copious quantities of mulled wine to all and sundry, doubtless rejoicing that heating it up was so easy indoors.

Most people then decided to go for a walk anyway and to make decisions on cooking methods on return. The 'quiz' was rather less formal than in recent years, with a prize being promised for the most interesting natural history sighting. Full waterproofs were donned and most of us set out for the shore to see what could be found. Everyone noticed the following gale and intermittently heavy rain!

Those of us with full length wellies forded the Craigmill Burn on the beach, despite it being a brown rushing torrent, and crossed to the relative shelter of Craigmill Den and the circular route of small roads back to our starting point. Others crossed the railway further west and headed for the Den that way. Not much of interest was seen - perhaps everyone's glasses were rain spattered! Mary spotted and photographed **velvet shank** fungus (*Flammulina velutipes*) on a tree stump where its orange colour stood out bright in the gloom.



Anne found a single, very small **cowrie shell** near the burn mouth and Christine kept pointing out birds for other people to identify. The best of these were a pair of **bullfinches** and a **kestrel** (which she did actually identify herself) on a list of only 22 species. Bob McCurley searched for and found the **ruff**, close to where it had been seen a few days before, so that he could add it to his newly started annual list. (He probably had a longer list than everyone else.)

Due to a belief that it would be too wet to light the barbecue Anne had (perhaps foolishly) left it locked in the car, so, unfortunately those who returned early had to resort to Dorothy's oven and grill to cook their lunch. However, it was more or less dry by now so, with the encouragement of Liz Houghton, a decision was made that it would be worth lighting it to relieve pressure on oven-space. The quick-lighting charcoal did its stuff and we were cooking on it within 15 minutes in a sheltered corner between the gate and front door. Inside the house space was still at a premium as all relaxed with cups of coffee and assorted home baking which had appeared on the table out of bags and rucksacks.

Despite the weather, everyone seemed to have enjoyed the day and we reckoned that over 35 people had put in an appearance at some stage during proceedings. Dorothy was thanked for providing such a comfortable venue and the use of her kitchen and all went home happy.

Anne Reid

## BEAUTIES AND BEASTS IN NORTH AMERICA

Ian Martin - 15th January

Ian's presentation was based on two visits that he had made to North America, the first to North Minnesota and the second to Vancouver Island and the Canadian Rockies.

In North Minnesota, Ian had helped in rescuing rare slipper orchids from roadside ditches, where the orchids and other rare plants would otherwise have been destroyed by road maintenance crews digging miles of large drainage ditches. The **queen slipper orchid** (*Cypripedium reginae*), which is the Minnesota State flower, is an impressive terrestrial orchid growing to one metre tall with large flowers that have a showy pink, pouched lip or 'slipper'. Pictures of the rarer all white orchid (*C. albiflorum*) were also shown. Ian explained that a special permit was required, even to salvage doomed plants, and that they had to be cultivated for a minimum of a year before being offered for sale to the public or commercial nurseries.

Images of another slipper orchid called the **moccasin flower** (*C. acaule*), (similar to Britain's only, and extremely rare, representative of the family, **lady's slipper** (*C. calceolus*)), were shown as well as other flowers including: **pitcher plants**, the **Canadian columbine** (*Aquilegia canadensis*), *Trillium grandiflorum*, the very rare *Arethusa bulbosa* and our Society's own plant emblem, **dwarf cornel** (*Chamaepericlymenum suecicum*).

Travelling into Canada, where Ian encountered **wolves**, we were shown **mule deer** and an **eastern hog-nosed snake**. On his visit to Vancouver Island, Ian encountered **sea**

**lions, grey and killer whales** and nesting **bald eagles**. Images of smaller creatures included **woodpeckers, hummingbirds, crayfish, a swallowtail butterfly** and..... **'banana' slugs!!** Flora was represented by images of **coral-root orchids, sundews, bell-flowers, twinflower** and **'Indian pipes'** (*Monotropa uniflora*).

During the same trip, Ian travelled from Seattle into the Canadian Rockies, where we were shown **marmot** beside the spectacular Moraine Lake and **chipmunks** at Lake Louise. Flowering plants shown were a species of **cassiope, phyllodoce, globe flower, arnica, penstemon, mountain avens** (*Dryas drummondii*), another orchid - **lesser twayblade** (*Listera cordata*) and yet another **slipper orchid** (*C. parviflorum*).

On the slopes of Pigeon Mountain near Harvey Heights, Ian showed a number of small alpine including **alpine delphinium**. Ian finished his talk with a dramatic image of Mount Aberdeen near Lake Louise, taken before he flew back to Vancouver by sea-plane.

Peter Ellis

## MEMBERS' NIGHT

29th January

Members had been invited to submit their digital images in advance this year, so that Brian Allan could organise them into a single file and thus make the evening run smoothly. He had done an admirable job, especially since, for the first time, there were more digital images than 'old fashioned' slides. In addition several people, including Daphne Macfarlane Smith and Davie Stein, had brought albums of photographs which were thoroughly examined by all at the end of the meeting.

Photographs shown were:

Bob McCurley Mainly Angus. A wide selection including a **white-tailed sea eagle** at Monikie, one of those released at Tentsmuir, a **black-throated diver** at Backwater Reservoir and a **common crane** at Scotston of Usan. Also a **comma butterfly** near Inchtute and an uncommon **earth star** (*Geastrum* sp.) found by Pat Gaff on dunes. The final image was of the Barry Buddon 'vacuum cleaners' (**highland cows**) which keep the vegetation in good condition.

Dorothy Fyffe Australian Wildlife. Everything from **donkey orchids** and **wax-tipped orchids** to **kangaroos, emus, sulphur-crested cockatoos** and **crimson rosellas**. We also learned that **koalas** in northern Australia are smaller than those down south and that the **Papuan frogmouth** has an extremely well camouflaged nest but would not win a beauty contest!

Brian Allan New Zealand. Brian's first photo was of the statue of Sir Edmund Hillary which faces towards Mount Cook where he trained for his ascent of Everest in 1952. His death, at the age of 88, had been reported a few days before our meeting. Other photos ranged from **fur seals** in Milford Sound, via vicious **keas** and **sun orchids**, to Jenny panning for **gold**.

Alban Houghton Mountain Memories. The Ben Lawers trip in July '07 gave us photos of **northern bedstraw**, mating **black slugs** and a **saxifrage** and **alpine forget-me-not**. **Parsley fern, green spleenwort** and **oak fern** had been seen the previous day on Caenlochan. We were also shown how to tell the difference between **bearberry** and **alpine bearberry** and warned that **cowberry** can easily be confused with the former.

Brian Ballinger Wildlife Selection. These Easter Ross photos ranged from three **adders** in a snow shower near Ben Wyvis, via **brindled beauty** and **emperor moths** to **twinflower** and **hybrid bugle** (*Ajuga pseudopyramidalis*) re-found in the area. Brian and Barbara had also





found that **serrated wintergreen** (*Orthilia secunda*) is not as rare in Easter Ross as once thought and it has now been recorded from 15 sites.

Liz Houghton Madagascar - Garden of Eden. This once-lush island is now largely used for agriculture, but pockets of natural vegetation remain including **spiny forest** with **baobab** trees. The wildlife we were shown is truly amazing ranging from a **giant millipede** and two kinds of **chamaeleon** to a **tenrec** and **ring-tailed lemurs**. Liz confessed to having run away from a particularly malevolent-looking **radiated tortoise**.

Kim Eberst New England - Autumn 2006. Photos of a roost of **monarch butterflies**, **porcelain berries** and a black and yellow **longhorn beetle** started off a very varied selection which then progressed via an **osprey** with a **fish**, a **grey squirrel** in its native land and some **fungi**, to a **moose** and spectacular **autumn colours** in the woods.

Gordon Maxwell A Miscellany. A view of Clova from Bachnagairn and **cormorants** on a tree at Balgavies Loch were followed by **seals**, an **otter** and **creeping lady's tresses**. We were then shown a pond at Tentsmuir with a huge mass of **frog spawn**, **lizards** at St Cyrus and a **painted lady butterfly** seen at the beginning of November on a Nats Saturday morning walk.

Jim Cook Flower Power. A sequence of photos of flowers to show their structure and complexity. We were shown a **water lily**, cross-sections of a **hyacinth** and a **bellflower** and then wind-pollinated **willow catkins**. An introduction was also given to **nectar guides**, flower coloration and the basics of **pollination** including 'carion flowers' which smell of rotting meat to attract **flies** and the complex mechanisms which some **orchids** have for ensuring cross-pollination.



The standard of photography seems to improve every year and, after such a spectacular and varied selection, Brian thanked all the contributors for sharing their photos. Anne Reid then thanked Brian

for coordinating all the digital images in advance and for being master of ceremonies, once again.

Anne Reid

## THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF THE BRITISH ISLES IN SCOTLAND RECORDING SCOTLAND'S FLORA

Jim McIntosh - 12th February

On a cold February night Jim McIntosh, the Scottish Officer for the BSBI, gave a fascinating account of the workings of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. The Society has a large national membership of amateur and professional botanists. It holds field meetings, workshops and conferences to promote education, training and research in botanical matters and publishes a journal, news bulletins and reports of scientific interest. We were introduced to the world of Vice-County Recorders and special experts who keep records of local flora in 112 separate areas of Great Britain and 40 areas in Ireland and who help in plant identification. An important contribution has been the publication of a New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora in 2002. Jim McIntosh's brief is to promote interest and co-operation in botany, support the Scottish membership and to help deliver scarce plant monitoring initiatives.

The BSBI is very active in Scotland, helping Scottish Natural Heritage to monitor SSSIs (Site Condition Monitoring) with the object of improving the condition of sites where there is evidence of damage or deterioration. In addition, it is trying to computerise the Vice-County Recorders' records to increase their usefulness for such purposes as updating the BSBI Maps Scheme. Long term changes in the Scottish flora are of special interest and the Society also has schemes in operation to monitor the status of some plants in decline such as **lesser butterfly orchid** (*Platanthera bifolia*) and **intermediate wintergreen** (*Pyrola media*).

The talk was accompanied by some excellent slides of familiar plants from montane habitats including **common cotton grass** (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), **northern rock cress**



(*Arabis petraea*) and **starry saxifrage** (*Saxifraga stellaris*). Past problems of probable misidentification were covered and the current changing populations of **curved sedge** (*Carex maritima*) and also some interesting finds including **close-headed alpine sedge** (*Carex norvegica*) on Ben More and **alpine milk vetch** (*Astragalus alpinus*) on Ben Chonzie.

To finish, Jim McIntosh gave us some very useful advice on improving our plant identification skills, which was much appreciated. Finally Pat Gaff called for a heartfelt vote of thanks for a very memorable talk.

Jack Moody

## SOCIAL EVENING

22nd February

It was a wild night! But that was just the weather and 32 members gathered in the Queen's Hotel where we were warmly welcomed. The tables looked festive with spring flowers provided by Margaret and her assistants, and the Nats looked in party mood too.

Lorna Ward and her team, Margaret McLaren, Helen Blackburn and Wynne Tennant, had prepared a varied programme of quizzes, all light-hearted and not too taxing. There were dreaded "feely boxes" where one expects to lose fingers among crocodile teeth and slimy toves - all good fun. The "smelly" competition got some strange answers - was it garlic or was it honey?

Supper of stovies and oatcakes, followed by apple pie or strawberry gateau, kept us quiet for a while and fortified us for more questions. The birdsong quiz had some familiar species and some good-quality guesswork - perhaps the clues were too generous. Jim Cook's slides proved quite tricky.

The evening closed with a lucky draw of lots of lovely gifts. Alban Houghton then thanked all the organisers for their hard work which made for such an enjoyable evening.

Marjory Tennant

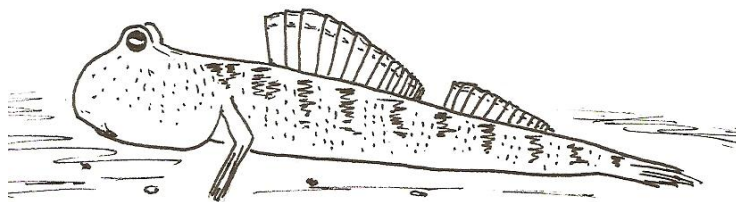
## THAILAND WILDLIFE

Kim and Alastair Eberst - 26th February

Kim treated us to a tour of Thailand, thoughtfully starting with a brief description of where Thailand is and the weather conditions. It is bordered by Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia, and has three seasons hot, rainy and cool. There is a variety of terrain with the highest mountain Doi Inthanon at 2,565 metres in the north, and a long coastal area providing varied habitats for a wide range of wildlife.

Kim took us on a tour of various areas of Thailand. On the island of Ko Phi Phi she had excellent pictures of **lesser-crested terns**, **great-crested terns**, **black-naped terns**, **Nordmann's greenshank** and the **brahminy kite**.

The Kaeng Krachen Reservoir and surrounding salt marsh are an excellent location for migratory birds to rest, feed and breed. In the mangroves various species of crabs make an appearance, including **fiddler crabs**, which are sediment feeders and important in the ecosystem as they digest organic matter, transforming it into a fertiliser. **Mudskippers** are uniquely adapted to an amphibious lifestyle, with the ability to survive on land with a mixture of air and water in their gill chambers enabling them to breathe while crawling in the mud and climbing on the **mangrove** roots. Larger animals included the **long-tailed macaque** and **elephants**.



Kim gave us a good insight into the rich variety of terrain and the way of life in Thailand, through some excellent pictures of animal and human life.

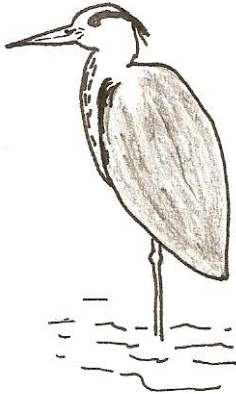
Lorna Ward

## SNOWDROP WALK – GAGIE HOUSE

1st March

A sunny day encouraged over 30 Nats, including our Honorary President, Gordon Corbet, to savour the **snowdrop** spectacle at Gagie. Shielded from the sharpish breeze, we could feel the sun's heat in the orchard and the woodland alongside the Sweet Burn. The **apple** trees were labelled but which trees were **quinces** we wondered? Some **honey bees** were obviously finding nectar-loaded flowers and so did we.

The even-petalled **snowflakes** and **aconites** joined in the **snowdrop** dance. Thinking on dancing, a few **daffodils** bloomed for St David's day. But what of wild flowers you ask? Though it is well-established, the **white butterbur** is an alien too. The fragrance mentioned in the books was absent.



The most spectacular native flower was a nice clump of **kingcups** (**marsh marigolds**) beside the burn. The odd **celandine** and **primrose** managed to peep through. The winter-fruiting **scarlet elf cups** brightened another patch. A good bird list was accumulated. Flocks of **long-tailed tits** and **goldfinches** were charming. Was the **great-spotted woodpecker** seen by Kate the same one heard drumming to a creaking tree accompaniment earlier? Three **thrush** species, three additional **tit** species and a **tree creeper** were noted. Lois spotted a **heron** and Doug a pristine male **grey wagtail**.

The party adjourned to Cath Rennie's in Wellbank where we tucked into Burritos and other tasty lunch dishes.

Alban Houghton

## BIRNAM CONIFER DAY

29th March

A keen group of 19 Naturalists enjoyed a welcome cuppa at Birnam Institute before a morning session learning about conifers from Sheila Brinkley. A notice board in the Institute foyer declared that a group of 'Naturists' was meeting upstairs but I can report that all Nats present were suitably clad for a cold day.

We started with a searching quiz and learned that conifers (literally 'cone-bearing') are gymnosperms ('naked-seeds'). Though there are 662 species worldwide, Scotland has only three native conifers - **Scots pine**, **juniper** and **yew**. So Scottish plant hunters have introduced conifers from all over the globe to add to this number. Since Dunkeld has a fine specimen tree collection, we went to see, feel and smell them after lunch, but not before we honed our identification skills with the samples of native and introduced species that Sheila had brought.

One particularly rugged and fissured **Douglas fir**, which could almost have been planted by David Douglas himself, was passionately hugged by eight Nats. Now really in the spirit of things, we punched the spongy bark of **Wellingtonia** (*Sequoiadendron giganteum* or **giant sequoia**). Sheila's favourite was *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* or **dawn redwood** which was discovered in central China in 1948.

We saw the unmistakable **monkey puzzle** tree (*Araucaria imbricata*) from Chile (was this a male or a female?) and the only surviving 'Granny' **European larch** planted close to the cathedral in 1738 by the Duke of Athol. As the rain came on we marvelled at the enormously spreading **grand fir** – crush the leaves to smell the grapefruit! We had enjoyed a stimulating and enjoyable day – thanks to Sheila.

Alban Houghton

## SUMMER OUTINGS

### RSPB VANE FARM

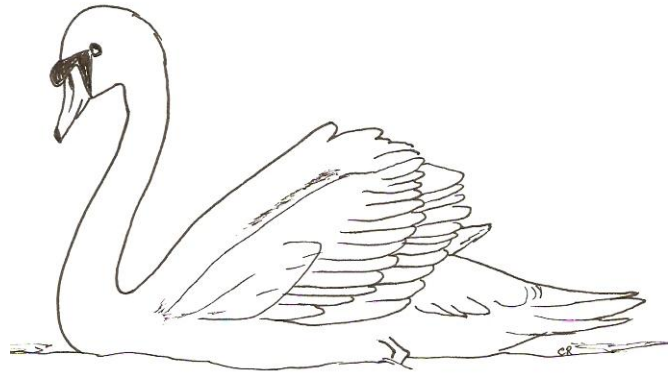
26th April

Despite a rather dismal, damp start those who travelled by coach to the Vane Farm RSPB Reserve at Loch Leven were enthusiastic about the prospect of enjoying the site, which is part of the Loch Leven National Nature Reserve.

Shopping and a cup of tea were first on the list of priorities, after which parties dispersed to the hides on site to begin viewing the birdlife. One party ventured further afield, on a newly laid woodland trail, to the Scottish Natural Heritage hide, which overlooks a small lochan to the east of the site, where the more unusual species were to be found.

Those who took the woodland trail were also rewarded by the sight and sound of many **willow warblers**, a **great-spotted woodpecker**, **goldfinch** and **siskin** before reaching the hide. This new trail also provided a chance to examine **fresh water mussel** shells which had been deposited on the trail. No one could offer an explanation for the presence of these shells in this location. Once at the SNH hide, just east of the RSPB Reserve many **ducks** were found including **wigeon**, **tufted, goldeneye, teal, gadwall, pochard** and the rarer **shoveler** and **shelducks**.

Waiting and watching brought great rewards. Among the birds spotted were **redshank, cormorant, sparrowhawk, buzzard, coot, moorhen, greylag goose, woodpigeon, great-crested grebe, house martin, yellowhammer, mute swan, carrion crow** and **red-breasted merganser**. From the large Gillman Hide there were excellent sightings of **fox** and **roe deer**.



Lunchtime arrived - and so did the sun, which shone on the picnic-lunchers who gathered in the gardens by the Reserve café, before setting out for a walk to the summit of Vane Hill (248 metres). This walk took our party through scenic woodland of **willows, pines, alder** and **birch**, where wildflowers seen included **primrose, wood sorrel, cowslip, wood anemone, celandine, marsh marigold** and **golden saxifrage**. Reaching the summit we were welcomed by wheeling **meadow pipits** and breathtaking views. The 360 degree panorama included the Lomond Hills, Cleish Hills and, to the south, Berwick Law.

The descent was made in very warm sunshine, which gave everyone an appetite for another cup of tea after which our party got on board for the return journey. Despite a dismal outlook at the beginning the day it had been filled with interest, with much seen and much enjoyed in the afternoon sunshine.

John Campbell

### BALGAVIES LOCH SWT RESERVE

13th May

A very good number of members came to the Loch on a lovely spring evening. Most came to the car park but there were also some cars parked up at the viewpoint. In an attempt to unite the party, we had a very quick look into the hide, (**coots, little grebe**, and feral **greylag**), before we set off anti-clockwise on the new path that now circles the loch. **Chiffchaffs** and **willow warblers** were serenading us near the hide, and there were more songbirds in the **cherry plums** on the slopes of the esker. These were sent by the nursery as **bird cherries**, but the birds don't seem to mind the mistake. Down by the loch shore where

the path runs along close to the water, David Lampard netted a variety of **water shrimps**, **caddis fly larvae**, and a **damselfly larva**.

We crossed the grassy area at the east end of the loch, taking the numerous stiles in our stride. Grazing is essential to keep the lochside vegetation in good order, hence the need for fences and stiles. We paused at the outlet of the loch by the old Auldbar Station. This is a good place to spot a **kingfisher**, perching on the **reeds** or overhanging **willows**. There is a functioning **eel trap** under the bridge, where SEPA do monitoring. In the past large boxes of live eels were sent off by rail from the station down to Billingsgate. The path then follows the old railway line west, through a new growth of **ash**, **alder birch** and **sycamore**, past the dead tree in the water where the **osprey** likes to perch. **Willows** lead down to the water. Some **kidney vetch** has re-established on the line but it is now getting too shady for it.

The path crosses the inlet of the Lunan, and the fastest member of the party, Vic Cammack, was lucky enough to spot an **otter**. The path then turns south past the warden's cottage, between the Fonah Bog to the west and the mature beech trees bordering the loch. This is the most likely place to spot **red squirrels** though they mainly feed on the **pin**es bordering the road. Again we ended up in the hide, where two pairs of **gadwall** were feeding, watched the **heron** across the loch and the **swans** at the far end. Most of the **cormorants** which roost on the island had headed for the coast. All members were able to complete the circuit, a testimony to their interest and fitness.

Liz Houghton

## OBAN WEEKEND

16th -18th May

Our weekend journey to discover some of nature's beauty in Oban, and its surrounding wooded and coastal countryside, began on a lovely afternoon when 29 Dundee Naturalists boarded the coach at the appropriately named Discovery Point in Dundee. Our route to the West took us through St Fillans, and on through dramatic Glen Ogle to Crianlarich, along Loch Awe side and the shores of Loch Etive into the town centre of Oban in time for a hearty dinner at our hotel.

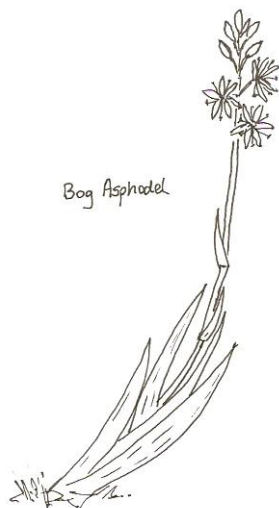
On Saturday morning we woke to disappointingly dull and drizzly weather. However, this was the west and such weather is not unknown, so, after welcoming Peter and Margaret Bainbridge who had joined us from Mull, where they had been holidaying, we set out, suitably equipped.

Leaving Oban the bus drove us to Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel. This castle was built around 1220 by the MacDougall clan, at a time when Argyll lay on the frontier between the kingdoms of Scotland and Norway. Sited on a promontory jutting out from the southern shore of Loch Etive, Dunstaffnage guarded the seaward approach up the loch to the Pass of Brander, and the way to the heart of Scotland. Later in its history the castle changed hands and eventually became a stronghold of the Campbells.

Several of the party enjoyed a bit of retail therapy at the Historic Scotland shop within the castle before beginning exploration of the castle itself, including its high ramparts, which provided wonderful views to the north, south, east and west - and homes for three nesting **thrushes**.

The grounds of the castle, which slope towards the shores of Loch Etive, gave everyone the opportunity to scour the heathland, marshy headlands, rocky foreshore and woodland for flora and fauna. Several interesting finds were spotted, including good specimens of the lichen **common lungwort** (*Lobaria pulmonaria*) which were found around the castle. **Heath spotted orchids**, pink flowers of **lousewort**, **common cottongrass**, **thrift (sea pink)** and the **leaves of bog asphodel** were also seen. Davie Stein made his discovery of **sea milkwort** on the rocky foreshore.

The grounds provided a very pleasant, if a little chilly, setting for picnic lunches before we all met up to board the



coach to travel northwards over the Connel Bridge, which spans the tumbling waters of the Falls of Lora, to arrive at our next destination, Sutherland's Grove.

Arriving at Sutherland's Grove, which forms part of the Barcaldine Forest, we had an opportunity to admire the wonderful sight of ancient coniferous woodland. Following the Abhainn Teithil burn through a grove of majestic **Douglas firs**, planted in 1870, we passed spectacular waterfalls on the climb to the Glen Dubh reservoir, which provides water to a hydroelectric scheme at the Marine Resource Centre in Barcaldine village. Views from the reservoir were dramatic, with the panorama stretching from the Shians to Lismore and the mountains of Mull and Morven.

Throughout the walk the weather improved and the sun made an appearance. Unfortunately even the sun did not tempt many birds to make an appearance during the walk but Jean Colquhoun and others heard a **wood warbler**, and a **grey wagtail** was spotted at the reservoir. However, this walk did provide the outstanding botanical find of the weekend when Barbara Ballinger found the beautiful, delicate **filmy fern**.

The coach was a welcome sight after a steep and long walk and the chance to just sit and watch the scenery as it delivered us safely back to our hotel, where drinks and food awaited, provided a much needed rest!

Fortified by food and drink some of the party, led by Jim Cook, undertook another walk along the Oban seafront towards Ganavan and the hilltop ruins of Dunollie Castle. This ruined castle, which overlooks Oban Bay, dates from around 1400 and was a former seat of the MacDougalls, the Lords of Lorne, who once owned about a third of the land in Scotland. Although the family left the castle in 1746 the castle ruins are still owned by MacDougall of MacDougall.

As well as a magnificent view of Oban Bay and the island of Kerrera the evening walking party enjoyed a wonderful display of **bluebells** before the fickle west weather cut short the post-dinner daunder and, somewhat bedraggled, the evening explorers made their way back along the shore road, spotting **cormorants**, **black guillemots** and a **Canada goose** before reaching the hotel. The evening's entertainment continued at the hotel with a local accordion player providing music and song for us all.



Sunday morning dawned sunny and clear with everyone ready to tackle Glen Nant National Nature Reserve close to Taynuilt. This reserve has a long history and 166 archaeological sites have been recorded in the area. The glen's peaty ground and lime-rich soil is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. The woodland is primarily **Atlantic oak wood** with some **hazel**, **ash**, **willow**, **birch** and **holly**. Work is in progress to remove conifers to allow native trees and ground flora to flourish. Glen Nant is an internationally important site for **lichens**, **mosses**, **ferns** and **liverworts**.

The journey to Glen Nant proved that, even being led by a Campbell in Campbell country in Argyll, you can lose your way, since the small turning outside Taynuilt leading to the glen was missed. However, a few hundred yards down the road our ever-amiable driver, Jim, completed an about turn and we were back on track.

On arrival at Glen Nant the party split into two groups - one taking the Riverbank Trail while another set out on the aptly named Ant Trail, along which ants construct their colonies in nests built from woodland debris. In the areas of damp woodland ground **early purple orchid** and **bog myrtle** were seen. Once again the find of the day was made by Barbara Ballinger, who identified a **hay-scented buckler fern**.

In the woodland there was a wealth of birds, butterflies, plants and insects. Many of the party heard the trilling of **wood warblers** and some saw them clearly. **Willow warblers**, the most melodic of the warblers, were plentiful. Peter Middleton and Davie Stein heard a **great-spotted woodpecker** and on moorland Gordon Maxwell saw, and several people heard, a **cuckoo**.

**Wood melick grass** and **sweet woodruff** grew on the forest floor, while an **orange-tip butterfly**, and the best butterflies spotted during the weekend, **speckled wood butterflies**, flitted through the trees. At ground level **wood ants** were observed around their nests.



All too soon it was time to climb back aboard our coach and set off on our return journey. We rounded off the trip with a welcome stop at Crieff visitor centre for some refreshment before taking the road and the miles to Dundee.

John Campbell

## POWMOUTH

31st May

After an extremely dry month the weather finally broke on Wednesday with heavy showers, giving the countryside a much needed drink. So, by Saturday, when it dawned bright and sunny, all the verges and wild places were lush and blooming.

Once everyone had carefully descended the short ladder from the bridge to the start we enjoyed the walk up the river South Esk as far as the weir.

The start of the walk was through **willow** scrub, which was full of **willow warblers** and **blackcaps** singing. Then, with spectacular views of the river and the banks a riot of colourful flowers in the warm sunshine, we enjoyed the sight of many **orange-tip butterflies** as well as **small tortoiseshells**, **peacocks**, **green-veined whites** and **red admirals**.

Although this walk is interesting and enjoyable at any time of year, we had chosen a perfect day to see it in all its beauty.

Dorothy Fyffe

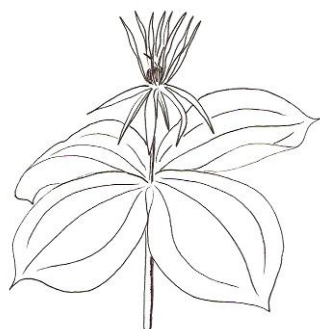
## TULACH HILL and BLAIR ATHOLL

14th June

37 members attended this outing on what turned out to be a showery day with spells of sunshine. The more energetic scaled Tulach Hill, whereas others opted for the less severely graded walks along the rivers Garry and Tilt.

After sampling the coffee in two different cafes we set out along the north bank of the river Garry and were greeted by a profusion of woodland flowers. These included **wood cranesbill** (*Geranium sylvaticum*), **crosswort** (*Cruciata laevipes*), **water avens** (*Geum rivale*), **herb bennet** (*Geum urbanum*) and their hybrids and many more. Further along **northern marsh orchid** (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) and **heath spotted orchid** (*Dactylorhiza maculata* or a hybrid) were in flower and on the rocks by the river **yellow mountain saxifrage** (*Saxifraga aizoides*) was present. **Chimney sweeper moths** flitted around near the beginning of the walk and **common gulls** nested on the shingle. Pat Gaff kept a close eye on plant identification and Dorothy Fyffe spotted the birds.

As the ground was wet most of us returned to Blair Atholl to eat our lunch sitting on tables by the river or a selection of other places.



In the afternoon we headed north along the banks of the Tilt (a few opted for other Blair Atholl attractions at this stage). After an initial overshoot two spikes of **bird's nest orchid** (*Neottia nidus-avis*) were located, camouflaged in the brown leaf litter. There was a remarkable profusion of the **white wood-rush** (*Luzula luzuloides*) along the track and it seemed to have spread since our last visit. We then admired the **common wintergreen** (*Pyrola minor*), **lily of the valley** (*Convallaria majalis*) and **hairy rock-cress** (*Arabis hirsuta*) in rapid succession. The climax of the walk was the **herb Paris** (*Paris quadrifolia*), very unusual this far north, lurking amongst **dogs mercury** (*Mercurialis perennis*) and **ramsons** (*Allium ursinum*). On our return **highland cattle** were scratching their necks on the fence obstructing the path with their horns. Although their intention was probably benign, we made a detour through the shrubbery to rejoin the rest of the group.

Brian Ballinger

## TULACH HILL

### Rust Fungi

**Lady's smock** showing vivid orange pustules on the underside was infected with the rust fungus *Trachyspora intrusa*. This fungus overwinters as mycelium in the tuberous rhizome (modified stem) of the plant and grows up with the leaves in spring. According to Wilson & Henderson (1966) "*British Rust Fungi*", this is a curious rust because instead of the usual five-stages in the rust life cycle, it only seems to produce the second stage, aecia with yellow aeciospores, quickly followed by production of telia with teliospores.

A sample of **dandelion** with yellow halo-like symptoms on the leaf was another rust, *Puccinia hieracii*. This rust fungus attacks a wide range of familiar plants in the Compositae family, such as **knapweed** (*Centaurea nigra*), **hawkweed** (*Hieracium* spp.) and **hawkbit** (*Leontodon* spp.).

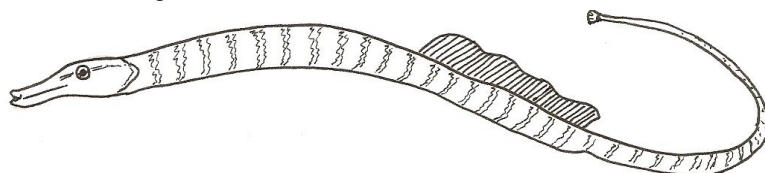
Brian Williamson

## EASTHAVEN ROCKPOOLS

Tuesday 17th June

It had rained for much of the day, so a glimmer of brightness at tea time raised hopes that somebody might turn up for this evening meeting. It turned out that my fears were unfounded and around 30 Nats and friends assembled in the car park. The fact that everyone's clothing looked more suitable for winter than mid-summer provoked a few comments, but it did, in fact, stay dry for the bulk of the evening.

David Lampard had borrowed all the nets he could find from Dundee Museum and Jim also brought one along, so we all set to see what we could find in the pools. Keith Cohen's first sweep of the net produced the best catch of the whole evening - a large **shanny**, a big **prawn** and a **crab**. Kim Eberst used tinned tuna to lure out an even bigger **shore crab**, and, though this method was considered akin to cheating by some, we should consider using this and other less intrusive methods more in the future. Further searches



produced four **snake pipe fish**, a species which is becoming increasingly common this far north. Richard Brinklow found a solitary **brittle star** low

down on the shore and most people saw **chitons**, **hermit crabs**, **beadlet** and **dahlia anemones**, **limpets** and **periwinkles**. At least two small **edible crabs** were also caught, with their characteristic 'pie-crust' edge to the shell.

The light failed far earlier than it should have for this time of year, but everyone seemed to have seen something new or unusual.

Anne Reid

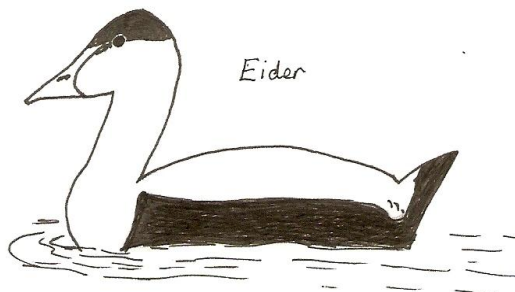
## BODDIN TO FERRYDEN

16th June

It was a rather damp and chill morning but a good crowd of keen Nats gathered at Boddin Point for the walk. Since there was no bus, we'd had to juggle the cars to drop the passengers off, park the vehicles in Ferryden and then ferry the drivers back to the start. Margaret McLaren played an important role in all this transport. While this was going on, the rest of the party walked down to the old lime kiln to take in the view and look for interesting records. We found and saw plenty: banks of **purple milk-vetch**, scattered plants of **yellow-rattle**, **common eyebright** and **purging flax**, a few **early purple orchids** and numerous spikes of **northern marsh orchids**, with clusters of fresh **carline thistles** on the slopes, **eider ducks** along the shore line, **guillemots** and **cormorants** on the water, **fulmars** wheeling around the cliffs and **gannets** shining as Maltese crosses far off-shore.



Once the party had gathered we set off along the cliff path towards Ferryden. A small group of the more intrepid walked along the beach and climbed the bank further along, to find and admire **sandwort**, **wild cabbage**, **charlock** and **wallflower**, **hemlock water-dropwort** and copious stands of **scentless mayweed** and **Himalayan balsam**, amongst others. A little further on we stopped off to admire the view over the Elephant Rock and then spent some time in the tiny cliff-top graveyard, with its fabulous outlook, to look for the headstone of 'the man who died before he was born'.



At that point the path became much rougher and more testing. The party split up with a group returning via the road to Boddin Point to pick up the remaining cars and travel around to meet the main group at Usan for lunch. The main party itself split up, the real 'mountain goats', including David, Joy, Liz and Alban, travelling along the difficult foreshore rocks and the main body, perhaps more sensibly, moving along the

path on the cliff top above. There was plenty to see, a wide variety of **sedges** and **rushes**, **wood vetch** in a few places, **sea asters**, **sea spurrey** and other shore plants, numerous **invertebrates**, **common blue butterflies**, **red admirals**, **peacocks** and **small tortoiseshells** with **common brown grasshoppers** among them, and **rock pipits**, a breeding colony of **cormorants** and a good scattering of **redshank** and **oystercatchers**. After a very strenuous scramble the 'rock group' were able to join the rest of the party at Usan for a well-deserved and leisurely lunch stop.

From then on, the walking was much easier and the party spread out to explore the delights of a relatively infrequently-visited stretch of coast. Coastal rock pools attracted some attention with arrays of small **shrimps** and **snails**, fringed with **spike rushes**, **sea arrow-grass** and **club-rush** in places, some **ragged robin**, stands of **yellow flag**, a scattering of **wall pellitory**, a few **greater mulleins** and occasional clumps of **hemp agrimony**. Along the shore line we recorded **common**, **hastate** and **grass-leaved orache**, **common** and **prickly sow-thistles**, a wide range of **vetches**, **vetchling** and **trefoils**, all the **plantains** and **curled** and **broad-leaved docks**. Although we recorded **sand**, **distant**, **false fox**, **glaucous**, **hairy** and **long-bracted sedges** we didn't find any **curved sedge**, although a careful eye was kept open for it. However, we were pleased to see **saltmarsh flat-sedge** and a good range of **grasses**.

Many of us stopped off in the sun for a breather below the lighthouse at Scurdyness and then made our way in to Ferryden. A pint of refreshment in a small hostelry rounded off the day. Liz Houghton was the overall winner of the best recording list.

Jim Cook

## CORRIE FEE

12th July

This outing was attended by some thirty members who arrived by private car. The group met in Glendoll car park and then drove up the forestry track to within a quarter mile of Corrie Fee. This was done by prior arrangement with the Ranger Service and saved us about a half hour walk.

Unfortunately, the weather was not in our favour with low cloud, patchy mist and occasional drizzle. Despite this, the botanists in the group found a number of typical mountain plants including **purple** and **yellow saxifrages**, **moss campion**, **moonwort** and **wood vetch**. Specialities of the corrie such as **yellow alpine 'vetch'** (*Oxytropis campestris*), **alpine saw-wort** (*Saussurea alpina*) and the **fern Woodsia alpina** were found, photographed and admired.

Birds were scarce. The expected **meadow pipits** were seen, and some members got views of a **peregrine** family plus **ring ouzels** and **ravens**.

Alex Rollo

## THE BLACK WOOD OF RANNOCH

26th July

Rob Coope, Tay Forest District Biodiversity Manager, was waiting by a slightly misty Loch Rannoch to welcome 34 Nats to the Black Wood. Rob clearly loves his job and his informal and informed tour was brilliant. **Common wintergreen** really was quite common round the parking spot.

**Scots pines** up to 400 years old with a mainly **heather** and **blaeberry** understorey showed what upland Perthshire looked like over 4,000 years ago. Browsing by excessive numbers of **roe** and **red deer** eliminated the understorey before public ownership in 1947. The trees' age was emphasised by *Usnea* sp. draped on the branches. Over 150 species of **lichen** are found in the wood. The core wood has been an SSSI since 1955 and reserve management aims to extend natural forest further (the Special Area of Conservation is 11,000ha in area). We peched up the slope to where a 300 year old Scots pine, Gunnar's Tree, honours Gunnar Godwin who finally secured the wood as a reserve in 1975.

**Birch**, **rowan**, **juniper** and other species are also part of the forest mosaic. Despite gorging on **blaeberrys**, we stopped for lunch when Dorothy and Rob noted a pair of **ospreys** cruising overhead and heard **crossbill** call-notes. Brian Williamson tracked a **crossbill** family party down and had good views of them dissecting **pine-cones**. Here and there were **wood ant** nests.

**Capercaillie** (and their chicks for the insect and berry stages) are very dependent on the **blaeberry**: early in the year they eat the young shoots, then the leaves and associated insects, then the berries. A fair number of **pine marten** scats were found on the track. We inspected and smelt them - quite a sweet smell, hence the name, **sweet mart** - they obviously enjoy **blaeberrys**, and **beetles** too. **Pine martens** are a research interest of Rob's. He feels that they do not threaten a healthy **capercaillie** population. His hunch that **pine martens** prefer to hunt **grey** rather than **red squirrels** was widely reported as 'a sensational discovery' by the press.

About half the party returned to the lochside beside the Dall burn and discovered several **bolete fungi**, including a bright orange **birch boletus**; also tasty **chanterelles** and a *Russula* species. If the Black Wood is a mere fragment, what a place the Great Wood of Caledon must have been! The bus driver negotiated the narrow south Rannoch road with aplomb and delivered us back to Dundee at 6.30 pm.

Alban Houghton

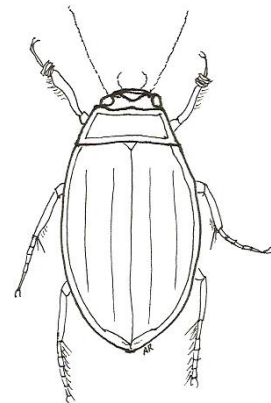
## BARRY BUDDON JOINT OUTING

10th August

A good number of assorted naturalists from all the usual local groups turned out for the annual Barry Buddon meeting on a day which promised to be fine after a wet Saturday.

Bob McCurley's birdwatching group managed to record 70 species this year, including migrants and seabirds. There were, however, a few notable absences including **robin**, **dunnock** and **song thrush**. The botanists, led by Jim Cook, visited the reed bed, which was ankle deep in water after rain the previous day but still had the usual good range of plants. The **grass of Parnassus** was hard to find until we discovered that it was mostly still in bud and got our eye in. Everyone converged at the 'scrapes' before lunch and some pond dipping by David Lampard and Mary Reid produced a scary-looking **great diving beetle**, various **tadpoles** and some small **fish** with what appeared to be parasitic growths. **Common hawker dragonflies** and three species of **damselflies** were also seen here.

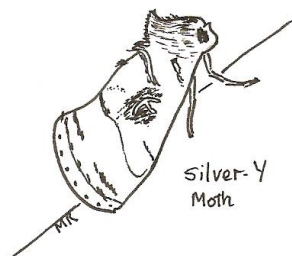
Between the various groups a total of 14 **butterfly** species was seen, including a few **dark green fritillaries**. **Shaded broad bar moths** were disturbed from the vegetation and **antler moths** and a **chevron moth** were also added to the list, among others. In the afternoon, at Happy Valley, **fox** and **roe deer** were seen



(briefly) and **adder's tongue fern** and **marsh pennywort** found before rain threatened and the party dispersed.

Thanks must go to Bob McCurley for, once again, organising this annual naturalists' treat, and to the MOD for their continued interest and cooperation.

Anne Reid



## BARRY MILL

Barbecue and Moth Trapping

12th/13th August

The forecast was bad. We arrived early, to set up the barbecue, to find Gordon Maxwell and Davie Stein sheltering in the marquee. They had arrived even earlier, hoping to get a walk before the rain arrived, but were not early enough. Peter Ellis very kindly set up a tarpaulin awning beside the marquee to protect the barbecue (and the marquee!) and the rain continued to fall.

Gordon and Davie tried birdwatching from under cover and eventually achieved a total of nine species - possibly the Nats' worst total ever - mainly by looking at the bird feeders near the cottage. Doug Palmer, Margaret McLaren and Jim Cook appeared, closely followed by Marjorie Gillan and Lorna Ward with David Lampard from Dundee Museum bringing up the rear. This was the total attendance, in addition to the three members of the Reid family, and everyone deserves a mention for turning out on such a night.

Moth trapping seemed rather unlikely but when the rain showed signs of easing, and actually stopped for a short time, everyone went out and painted sugaring mixture onto tree trunks and hung up wine ropes (wine plus sugar - very sticky) in suitably sheltered places. Two more birds were added to the list at this stage - a **dunnock**, and a **kingfisher** which Jim heard up the mill lade.

The barbecue was ready for cooking by the time we got back and the rain was back on, so the social side of the evening took over. After the barbecued 'firsts' Peter had made some fresh fruit salad which we all greatly enjoyed. Christine had been baking and her brownie was very popular with a cup of coffee.

It kept on raining - either hard or very hard. Our thoughts returned to natural history when a small **toad** had to be removed from the reception area. David Lampard managed to 'hear' a **bat** with the bat detector, though it was the kind of night where any sensible bat should have stayed in its roost. Someone even claimed to have seen one, briefly. Our first **moth** appeared at the ceiling light in the marquee. It turned out to be a **silver-Y**, a strong flying migrant that can sometimes be seen hovering at flowers in the daytime.

Most people then went home. David and Peter tried to get the Robinson trap to work but its ancient electrics and the power supply did not seem compatible in the rain, even though they tried to set it up under cover. Mary and I set up the battery-powered Heath trap down near the burn and then, since we were quite wet anyway, went and checked the wine ropes and sugared areas. We found a **common rustic** on one of the ropes and then retreated again. A **mother of pearl** and a **dun bar** came into the lighted marquee and a **grey chi** was attracted to the lights in the toilets. A final round of the ropes yielded a **phoenix**, three **July highflyers**, a **dark arches** and four **very wet Nats**.

By the time we returned in the morning the sun was threatening to put in an appearance. Marjorie Gillan also returned and Dorothy Fyffe felt the weather was set fair and appeared on her bike. The trap actually had a few moths in it and quite a lot of **caddis flies** - is there an expert out there to help us with their identification next time? Notable moths were **small phoenix**, **rosy rustic** and **flounced rustic**, all of which were well-photographed before being released. Our total tally was 16 species of moth - not bad considering the conditions! As we were about to leave a **peacock butterfly** was seen in the cottage garden and the **dipper** was searching the lade for food - the main burn had risen alarmingly overnight and was a dark coffee colour making it very hard for it to hunt there.

Jim's verdict was that it had been the wettest Nats barbecue of all time. Nobody argued with him!

Anne Reid

## KILMINNING COAST AND FIFENESS

23rd August

34 members were fortunate to pick the one sunny day in a very wet week, although the ground was still soggy underfoot. After a brief stop in Crail, where some managed to fit in coffee and cake, we drove to the Kilminning Coast SWT reserve, the driver skillfully negotiating the winding road. We then divided ourselves into long and short walks parties and both groups looked at the reserve and walked along the coastal path to Fifeness (which proved to be a little uneven in places).

The flowers were past their best but there was still a colourful display of **knappweed** (*Centaurea nigra*). Pat Gaff explored the small patch of **saltmarsh**, where the attractive **sea aster** (*Aster tripolium*) was to be seen - this area was partly fenced off, perhaps to keep the "flying flock" of grazing sheep out. A **stonechat** followed us closely.

There were some **butterflies**, although perhaps not as many as expected on such a sunny day, and Doug Palmer spotted the first **green-veined white**, shortly followed by a **small copper** seen by Roy Partington. Further on **Scots lovage** (*Ligusticum scoticum*), now in seed, was admired and this was present in some quantity at Fifeness. A solitary large plant of **sea kale** (*Crambe maritima*) was holding on in the shingle and this was compared with escaped **wild cabbage** (*Brassica oleracea*) nearby.



At the point Gordon Maxwell found a beautiful **caterpillar**, probably of a **grey dagger moth**, and **seals** were seen lying at the edge of the rocky shore. Here the party divided, 13 returning to Crail and 21 undertaking the 4.5 mile coastal stretch to Kingsbarns.

The longer walk skirts golf courses and cow fields that sometimes divert the path onto the tidal and rocky shore, but fortunately the tide was well out. On the edge of the golf course the flowering heads of a good population of **frog orchids** (*Coeloglossum* or now *Dactylorhiza viride*) were still present, surrounded by **quaking grass** (*Briza media*) and the dead heads of **cowslips** (*Primula veris*). A **gannet** was standing well up the shore and we decided it must have been ill or injured. The geology of this coast is interesting and we spotted plant and animal **fossils** in the stones and boulders.

A large group of **sea spleenwort** (*Asplenium marinum*) plants was present on the cliff at one of the more remote points and **silver-Y moths** were seen in the dunes near Cambo. When we got to the Kingsbarns shore car park it was busy and it was decided it might be unwise to bring the coach down. After a few technical problems with mobile phones, the other group was contacted and we all met up in Kingsbarns village. Here some enjoyed a little refreshment in the hotel before boarding the coach.

Brian Ballinger and Dorothy Fyffe

## GLEN QUOICH

Fungus Foray

13th September

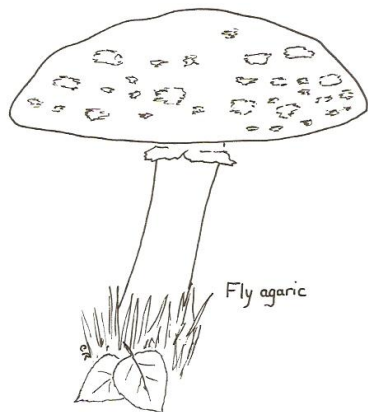
The 36 Nats present had an early start for the outing to this lovely glen on the Mar Estate. It was wet (probably good for fungi) but spirits were not dejected. A welcome change for me to enjoy scenery from a high coach seat than from behind a steering wheel.

After a brief stop in Braemar we set off aware that many of the specimens we could encounter would have a mycorrhizal association with the **pine** trees of this part of the old Caledonian forest. This was borne out almost immediately with the discovery of *Rozites caperata*, a rarity and confined to the Scottish Highlands. Close by, examples of sturdy, brittle-fleshed *Russula* sp. were at hand. These fungi provide some of the most handsome

and highly-coloured examples one can find. *R. turci* with deep plum red caps was present, again associated with pine trees, and *R. claroflava*, the **yellow swamp russula**.

There were several members of the bolete group which have spongy pores instead of gills. A common species was the **larch bolete**, *Suillus grevillei*, deep yellow with a very slimy (viscid) cap. Others included *Suillus bovinus*, *Xerocomus badius* and a **cep**, *Boletus edulis*. Another edible fungus found was **chanterelle** and a large mature specimen was duly sniffed to detect the aroma of apricots.

The Punch Bowl, a hollowed rock in the centre of the ravine is perfectly named and Jim Cook gave us the historical background to this interesting feature. It is a natural pothole which was reputedly used by the Earl of Mar to serve punch to his Jacobite followers in 1715.



Some members of the party walked up to a slightly higher path above the river and this area yielded some rather different fungi. *Lactarius* sp. (**milk caps**) quickly produce a milky fluid when damaged and were represented by *L. vietus* (grey) and *L. deterrimus* (carrot-coloured milk). It was good to find several **fly agarics**, *Amanita muscaria*, so well known with their scarlet caps dotted with white warts.

The grassland near the car park yielded several **waxcaps** including *Hygrocybe conica* which is yellow flushed with red which blackens on touch. Pat Gaff explained the importance of retaining the old pasture habitats favoured by these fungi as they could be

important in predicting the health of the soil in these areas.

A short walk in the dry after lunch produced a rare sighting of the pure white form of **bell heather**, *Erica cinerea*. Some folk, exploring off the path at this point encountered **adders**! I was hoping for a glimpse of a **golden eagle** above the skyline, but it was not to be.

Proceedings were rounded off with a welcome cuppa and curious cakes known as 'scoruts' at the Spittal of Glenshee Hotel.

Sheila Brinkley

## AUTUMN MEETINGS

### PLANTS AT THE MARGIN A BOTANICAL VIEW OF CLIMATE CHANGE

8th October

Professor Bob Crawford, lately retired from St Andrews University, delivered an excellent and fascinating lecture on 'Marginal Species', plants that grow at the edges of habitats and ecosystems. Because they are stressed, these species form an excellent way of examining the effects of global warming and monitoring climatic changes.

In the Andes of South America, near the border line between Chile and Argentina, a natural tree-line of two species of **southern beech** (*Nothofagus pumilio*, a deciduous tree, and the evergreen *N. dombeyi*) occurs at over 15,000 feet. In Bolivia the tree-line reaches 5,300 m (17,400 ft), the world record, but the trees are limited not by cold, as might be expected, but by lack of water. On the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in eastern Africa, the tree-line reaches 4,500 m (15,100 ft). Typically, many marginal species in such extreme habitats are polymorphic (occurring in a variety of forms).

In northern Canada, the tree-line is further north in the west, at 68°N, than in the east, where it is 55°N. In the east the dominant species is *Picea glauca* and, interestingly, there is a cooling trend. In the west the dominant species is *P. mariana* (**black spruce**) and the climate is warming slightly. The trees characteristically assume a variety of tortuous shapes, termed Krummholz vegetation, due to frost damage in open situations. This effect occurs from 47°N in the open lichen-rich spruce forest. The freezing cold air prevents regeneration once the forest has been opened up, whether by fire or by insect attack. A similar situation

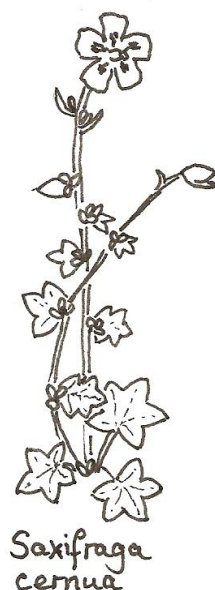


occurs in western Siberia but the tree-line has retreated south by about 700km due to bog growth. This is due to permafrost which impedes drainage and promotes bog formation. However, the trees themselves are involved. By shading the ground, they cool it further and the permafrost develops higher in the soil and kills the roots. The trees die, the soil is exposed once again and warms slightly and the permafrost retreats deeper underground. As a result, trees can start to grow again and the cycle is repeated over a long period. A similar situation occurs in Glen Affric, with peat inhibiting tree growth. At the west end of the glen, peat formation began around 6,000 years ago and pines have largely been absent for the last 2,000 years.

Professor Crawford next discussed sand dune formation at a variety of sites including Luskentyre in Harris, on Vatersay and at St Andrews. He pointed out that they are physically fragile but biologically robust. In contrast, he was able to demonstrate through a series of photographs that salt marshes, and particularly one at the head of Loch Tongue, are amazingly stable and have hardly changed over the last 50 years.

He continued on to describe the plants of Horn Sound, on Spitzbergen. The flora is mostly coastal and is ancient; it seems to have originated in the Altai Mountains as long as 20 million years ago and some of it, at least, must have survived north of the ice sheets throughout the Pleistocene period. The area was a semi-nunatak facing the sea and has been free of permanent ice for some 450,000 years. Interestingly, the limiting factor is the levels of nutrients in the soil, not the very low temperatures.

Professor Crawford rounded off with a series of fascinating descriptions of some of the adaptations of plants in extreme conditions. **Iceland purslane** (*Koenigia islandica*), the most northerly of all annual plants, bears huge seeds for such a tiny plant but these allow the seedling to germinate and grow rapidly in the very short growing season. *Saxifraga cernua*, another arctic species (and alpine and rare in Britain), doesn't form seeds at all but instead produces bulbils, which can start growing immediately after being shed. The seeds and seedlings of **arctic willow** are covered in fine hairs, like down, which insulate them in their own little greenhouses, raising temperatures by up to 10°C and improving germination and growth. In Alaska, the greatest danger faced by the **black spruce** is not the cold but drought. Two forms have developed, an alpine form that grows better in colder conditions and a coastal form that does better in warmer and wetter conditions at lower altitudes. *Saussurea gnaphalodes*, which grows at up to 24,000 feet in the Himalayas, also is adapted to cope with problems with water, but in its case the hairy covering prevents the stomata from being clogged by drops of moisture. The audience was regaled with further descriptions of plants in New Zealand, Scandinavia, the Alps and the Massif Central and the ways that species in these extreme conditions are pre-adapted to climate changes. It seems that many plant species will be able to cope with a wide variety of changes to come.



Jim Cook

## THE CAIRNGORMS A BOTANICAL PERSPECTIVE

Theo Loizou - 28th October

Theo introduced his talk on the botanical aspects of the Cairngorms with a slide presentation showing various ecological aspects of the area, with many parts so remote that the botanical examples are undisturbed. The Cairngorms has the largest area of arctic mountain landscape in the UK, and includes moorland, forests, rivers, lochs and glens.

The presentation then focused on the various zones of the mountains. Starting with the forest zone, the Caledonian pinewoods are home to some of the country's rarest wildlife and are considered to be one of the last remaining wildernesses in the British Isles. Moving on to the sub-montane zone, the views showed heathland and blanket bog with **dwarf birch**.

The tour of the Cairngorms finished with the high mountain area over 3000ft showing bog and alpine acidic grassland, with **mountain bog sedge** and **dwarf willow**.

Theo then moved on to highlight some of the management issues within the Cairngorms National Park. Trees have been felled to provide high intensity grazing for sheep which, in turn, helps to maintain diversity. **Deer** management is an issue as the increase in their population has resulted in overgrazing in some places. Grazing does not encourage tree growth!

The presentation both informed about the botanical aspects as well as challenged us to think about the management of this wilderness area.

Lorna Ward

## **D'ARCY THOMPSON MUSEUM**

Saturday 18th November

We were welcomed in to Dundee University's Zoological Museum by the curator, Matthew Jarron, who'd opened it especially for us. It is sited in a large room in the basement of the Carnelley building of the University and contains displays of a large number of the specimens surviving from the original zoology teaching museum of the University. Most of the specimens had been obtained and prepared by Professor D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson himself and the museum had been set up and curated by the Professor. It lasted until the early 1950's when, with changing courses and developments in the science, the need for such a museum had declined and the University was desperate for space. Nearly all the larger and some of the smaller specimens were dispersed, although the remainder still formed an impressive display.



How appropriate, then, that it turned out that our Honorary President, Dr Gordon Corbet (himself a zoologist), who'd joined us for the visit, told the group that he had been a student at the University in the early 50s and had been involved in helping to organise the disposal of specimens. Even more appropriately, Gordon told us that as a young boy he'd seen the great man, D'Arcy Thompson himself, back in the 1930s. How satisfying to have such a direct link back to D'Arcy Thompson, the founding Professor of Zoology in Dundee University, and one of the most influential and best-known zoologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He formed very strong connections with the Dundee Naturalists' Society, was a council member for many years, served as President in the 1890s and was Honorary President for a short time in the late 1940s. (For that matter, Professor Thomas Carnelley, the first Professor of Chemistry in the University, also

was a DNS council member for a short time during the same period.)

Matthew began our visit with a short digital presentation of D'Arcy Thompson and the zoology museum. To everyone's interest and Gordon Corbet's amusement, one of the images showed him as a young man standing beside the skeleton of the Indian elephant which formed the centrepiece of the museum back then. Afterwards, Matthew conducted us around, showing the fascinating array of stuffed and preserved specimens, dissections, skeletons, models and other teaching materials. So interesting, in fact, was the collection that a number of us were rather reluctant to leave when we ran out of time and Matthew had to lock up. The Nats' first winter excursion of the season finished with a satisfying lunch in a hostelry across the Perth Road from the University. It had been a most interesting morning.

Jim Cook

## **RAKING THE MIDDENS**

Catherine Smith - 11th November

Catherine described her work as an osteoarchaeologist, that is, one who specialises in the examination of bone. Catherine started her career with Ian Hodgson at Duncan of

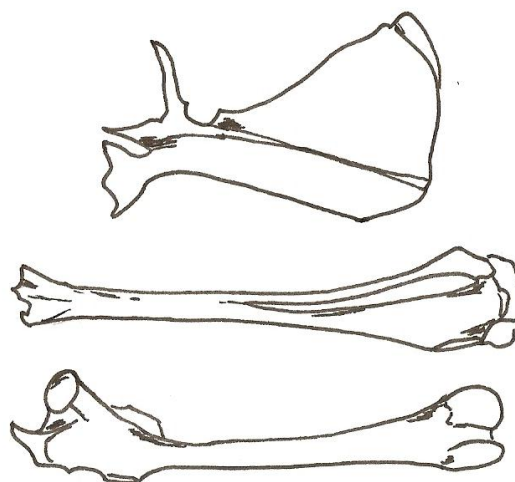


Jordanstone College and now works for the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust. Her first job was studying animal bones found during excavations on Hadrian's Wall.

Osteoarchaeology is a branch of archaeology which tries to examine everyday life by looking at bones. The best places to find animal bones are in rubbish dumps or middens. Although thought of as prehistoric, there were operating middens in Dundee until the 1930s. The most common bones found are from cows. In terms of the range of dates covered, little Roman age material has been found in Scotland, but much more from the mediaeval period such as from the 9th century and between 1000 and 1500 AD.

The first major urban excavations were in Perth under a building demolished during town redevelopment. The Ancient Monuments Board funded excavations in Perth High Street in 1975-1977. Organic remains were well preserved because flooding had kept the ground waterlogged. The preservation of organic remains depends on the soil type and other environmental factors. Skeletal remains are less well preserved in acid soils because the calcium in the bone is dissolved.

Middens contain lots of bones but usually these are not found as complete skeletons. Counting all the similar leg bones can give an idea of how many animals are present. The state of the bone also can give a rough indication of age. Juvenile animals have growing points at the ends of the long bones. This is usually an area of weakness and the ends of the bones can become detached. In adults the ends have fused, and the bones are usually complete. Ageing animals by looking at their teeth is more reliable. Juvenile or adult teeth can be identified and the wear on adult teeth can give an idea of the animal's age. Comparisons are made with material from known animals to aid identification.



The old breeds of domestic animal were used for a range of purposes. In cows, for example, milk is obtained from animals with calves. But in older cows the value was in the hides. In sheep the value was in the wool. Wool was varied in colour, not the uniform white we see in modern breeds, and was often brown but it could also be dyed. However the Romans were known to breed for white sheep. Historic breeds of animal were a lot different from modern breeds. They were probably not as large as modern breeds but they were hardier. Some early breeds of sheep have four horns; however this is thought to be a mutation rather than breeding. Mediaeval breeds of pig were found up to the 1920s in Shetland and were related to wild boar. Pigs were fed on scraps. Horses did not appear until the medieval period and were generally larger than a modern pony. Horses were general work horses and skulls have been found in urban sites.

Middens usually contain the remains of domestic animals. Animals such as horses, cows, pigs and deer can be identified from bones and teeth but it is difficult to tell the difference between sheep and goats from the bones and even from the teeth. Dogs were feral, and individual breeds were not recognised. Instead more general types of dog could be recognised from their size. Other bones found include birds such as chicken and geese. Some wild animal remains such as red deer have been found. Red deer antlers can be aged by the number of tines or points on them.

The marks on bones can be used to discover how they were treated. Butchery marks were made by cleavers, while secondary cuts were made by knives. Saws were rarely used until more modern times. However saws were used to make bone and antler artefacts such as combs, pins, toggles and toys. In Perth hundreds of cattle horn cores were found in a workshop. It was thought that the site could be part of a tannery or one that worked in horn.

This was a very entertaining and unusual lecture which gave us an insight how methods used in natural history can shed light on human activities.

David Lampard

## BOTANIC GARDENS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Alasdair Hood - 25th November

Alastair started by giving us a definition of a Botanic Garden: "An Institution holding a documented collection of living plants for scientific research, conservation, display and education". In the ten years that he has been in Dundee the Botanic Garden has seen a rise in visitor numbers from 6,000 to 75,000 per year. The Dundee Botanic Garden is one of 2,300 in the world, visited by some 200 million visitors each year, which encourage greater public engagement with plants and the living world.

We were given a brief history of the Dundee garden from its beginnings as a hay field in 1971, and shown the original large sycamore tree still standing proud some 37 years on. The geographically based layout keeps plants in their botanical context to a certain extent.



Where else outside Australia could one see such a stand of mixed **eucalyptus** forest or view a wide assemblage of Mediterranean plants? This helps to show plants in a semi-natural environment and makes them more attractive to visitors. Many of the plants have space in the garden because they are interesting but not necessarily 'pretty'. Hence there is space for **pin**es with their fascinating three-year reproductive progress, but no place for **flowering cherry** which Alasdair described as 'boring'! Some plants, such as the **skunk cabbage** (*Lysichiton americanum*) are used for teaching. This giant arum lily relative has a complex pollination mechanism which is largely based on the very unpleasant smell which it gives off to attract flies which are then trapped to effect pollination.

Sustainability in the garden is now encouraged by finding shelters, cabins and benches made from Scottish **oak**. No more tropical hardwoods here! In addition, Alasdair welcomes candidates from Dundee College to use the garden for chain saw courses. The students benefit and the garden gets necessary tree felling done for free!

A recent success story in the field of conservation has concerned the **sea pea** (*Lathyrus japonicus*). This was threatened at its very small site at Carnoustie, by the works associated with the golf course. Seed was collected and grown on in the garden and the plant has now been introduced at Broughty Ferry, near the **sand martin** banks. It remains to be seen how long it will survive there as there may not be the required amount of sand disturbance.

There is always a need to renew plants, fell trees and generally remodel any garden, but this has been made increasingly difficult in the Botanic Garden due to staff cut-backs and the threat to the garden as a whole. We hope that this valuable, interesting and, in my view, very attractive garden will go on for many years to come and develop to maturity.

Anne Reid

## HELPING PEOPLE HELP BIODIVERSITY IN DUNDEE

John Whyman - 10th December

This lecture was not in its usual Wednesday afternoon venue of the Tower Extension but in our evening haunt of T9, but we do not think any of our audience went astray.

John Whyman was until recently a Dundee Countryside Ranger and has just moved to the post of Greenspace Development Officer in the city. He also runs the Dundee Conservation Volunteers and has worked with many local voluntary groups, including the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

John described the local projects he has been involved in, starting with the development of the Trottick Ponds Local Nature Reserve. Work here has included the creation of small, fish-free ponds for amphibians and building artificial otter holts. Recently the reserve received the Green Flag Award.

Middleton Wood near Whitfield is a new community woodland being established by volunteers from many local schools and other organisations. The various groups have planted trees in particular parts of the wood. Young people have become enthusiastic and vandalism has declined.

The Miley Reserve in Dundee was established by the SWT on a disused railway line and required considerable volunteer and other involvement, including rubbish clearance and tree planting. The local SWT Group continues to play a part in its maintenance.

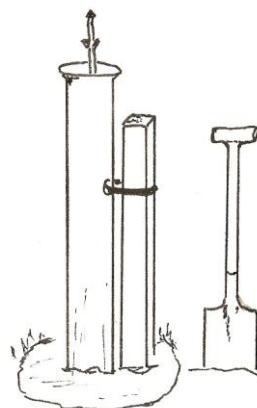
Dundee is unique amongst Scottish cities in having a **red squirrel** population, in spite of the **grey squirrel** threat. Volunteers are monitoring transects, management is being undertaken and there have been some hopeful signs of a spread of the red squirrel from its current locations.

John set up the Dundee Conservation Volunteers in 1992, having been a member of a similar group in England, and now an average of ten volunteers go out monthly to do local conservation work.

Dry stone walls have been repaired, and the habitats of rare species such as the **greater yellow rattle** (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*) and the **yellow meadow ant** have been improved. At Craighall Den the advance of *Rhododendron ponticum* has been reversed. The volunteers enjoy their experience for many reasons, including learning new skills, visiting new places, protecting wildlife habitats and (according to one) the pleasure of getting muddy.

John has made an important contribution to local nature conservation and we look forward to his contribution to Dundee's environment in his new role.

Brian Ballinger



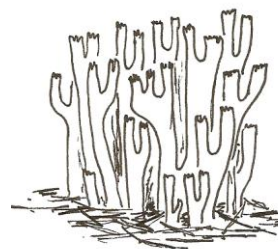
## FUNGI - BAD AND BEAUTIFUL

Sheila Brinkley and Gordon Maxwell  
16th December

Sheila started the talk by saying that 2008 had been a good year for fungi, and not only in the autumn. Her part of the talk focused on those fungi which have gills and she showed us the wide range of such fungi which exist ranging from well known species such as the **scarlet flycap** (**fly agaric**) to the less well known but equally interesting **snowy inkcap** which will grow only on cow pats. Another aspect of fungi which most people are aware of is the tendency of some species to grow in 'fairy rings'. These develop as the underground hyphae, which actually make up the majority of the organism, spread out year on year as the food supply is used up. These rings can be hundreds of years old and we were shown an interesting picture of a ring of **St George's mushroom** on a cliff top in Orkney, where erosion had caused half of the ring to be lost.

Fungi can be found in a wide range of habitats with woodland and grassland probably the most typical habitats. There is however one species of *Russula* which grows only in association with *Sphagnum* moss. Sheila also related a tale of how she had once been attempting to photograph a fungus on a road verge and had looked up to find a large **bull** just the other side of the wall. She wasn't sure who got more of a fright!

Though Gordon's part of the talk was mainly concerned with those fungi which do not have gills he started by showing us a few pictures from the Nats' fungus foray at Glen Quoich earlier in the year. He then showed us the range of different forms which non-gilled fungi can take. We are all probably aware of the **bracket fungi** which are regularly seen on tree trunks and **puff balls** growing in grass but may not have come across the **bird's nest fungus** which looks as if it contains a number of small eggs and has been found growing at the dump at Riverside or *Ramaria stricta* which produces a fruiting body which looks like a clump of fingers. Another interesting species is the **hare's ear fungus** which releases spores with a two to three second delay if it is blown on.



After the conclusion of the talks both of our speakers were thanked before we moved on to the social part of the evening. A particularly fine spread of goodies had been provided by members and we all enjoyed the chance to chat over tea or coffee.

Mary Reid

## MEMBERS' ARTICLES

### INTERESTING SIGHTINGS 2008

This compilation is intended to let people know what has been seen locally, and to provide records for the future. All contributions are welcome. Each entry is followed by the initials of the recorder. The location of garden records for frequent contributors is noted on the list below.

The year seemed wetter than usual, again, and butterflies were scarce, though **commas** were recorded by several people. Some species seem to have thrived though - I have never seen so many **long-tailed tits** in a season, both in the garden and elsewhere and **roe deer** are becoming more common, or bolder.

|                         |      |                        |
|-------------------------|------|------------------------|
| Ruth Arnold             | RA   | Invergowrie            |
| Brian Ballinger         | BB   | Dundee, West End       |
| Joy Cammack             | JoyC | Birkhill               |
| Jim Cook                | JC   | Broughty Ferry         |
| Tom Cunningham          | TC   | Tentsmuir Point Ranger |
| Monica Edwards          | ME   | Invergowrie            |
| Pat Gaff                | PG   |                        |
| Shelagh Gardiner        | SG   |                        |
| Alban Houghton          | AH   | Letham, Angus          |
| Daphne Macfarlane Smith | DMS  | Broughty Ferry         |
| Colin McLeod            | CM   |                        |
| Gordon Maxwell          | GM   | Dundee, Lochee         |
| Margaret Palin          | MP   | Broughty Ferry         |
| Jean Pollard            | JP   | Dundee, West End       |
| Anne Reid               | AR   | Monifieth              |
| Brian Williamson        | BW   | Dundee Law area        |

**3rd January** One **black swan**, three **white swans** and a **heron** all in pond near Dronley Farm. JoyC.

**6th January** Three **roe deer**, a large flock of **snow buntings** and another of **yellowhammers** and six **curlews** seen on the ridge behind Auchterhouse Hill, en route for Ark Hill. A very 'guid new year' indeed. JoyC.

**10th January** Six **siskin** feeding in the garden. ME.

**11th January** Two **snowdrop** plants had appeared at the back of the house, in the same location as previous years, on 6th January but they didn't open until the morning of the 11th. JC.

**21st January** Dorothy spotted a **stoat** in **ermine** when we were doing a recce for the South Esk walk, between Brechin and Montrose Basin. It was very busy foraging and, with the lack of snow, VERY obvious. AH.

**21st January** When returning home through Dawson Park at about 10.15 pm in the evening the lonely piping call of what sounded like a **golden plover** attracted my attention. Could this be true, or was another bird mimicking the call? **Oystercatchers** commonly roost at night in the open spaces and **curlews** are not unknown, but I've never heard a **golden plover** there before. What else could it be?





Any ideas, anyone? JC. (Bob McCurley thought just possibly a golden plover, but unlikely. Ed.)

**24th January** On meadows at Easter Keith Farm near Lundie, in full sunshine, about 50 **fieldfares** with a **redwing** and **starlings** were feeding by probing the soil amongst the **cattle**. BW.

**27th January** A **white-tailed bumblebee** with full pollen sacs at **cyclamen** flowers by my front door. One also seen the next day. This species now seems to keep colonies going through the winter months. A relatively mild spell with temperatures reaching 10°C on two preceding days. AR.

**27th January** At the out-flow of the river at Port Allen a male **red-breasted merganser** emerged from the **reeds** at low tide and cruised downstream to the Tay. BW.

**31st January** Despite a gale, and snow flurries, I walked part of the St Vigeans Nature Trail and was rewarded with close views of a mixed flock of small birds including **long-tailed**, **great**, **coal** and **blue tits**, with attendant **goldcrests** and a **treecreeper**. There was a lot of high-pitched squeaking! AR.

**3rd February** Large quantities of **frogspawn** found in puddles near to the top of Craigowl Hill. Not much chance of them developing unless the spring is very wet to keep the puddles topped up. PG.

**5th February** On the way to a Nats Council meeting at 7pm my headlights picked out the unmistakable white form of a **barn owl**, perched on a fence post on the road between Monifieth and Newbigging. AR.

**8th February** Saw first **buff-tailed bumblebee** (*Bombus terrestris*) of the year. DMS.

**10th February** At least 12 eager **frogs** have arrived in the garden pond. No spawn as yet. BB.

**12th February** A **song thrush** singing on the Miley SWT Reserve. CM.

**17th February** One male and two female **siskins** in the garden. ME.

**27th February** Christine had the presence of mind to photograph a queen **buff-tailed bumblebee** in my absence so that I could confirm the identification. The first of the season out of hibernation, though there have been some **white-tailed bumblebees** around all winter. AR.

**27th February** Two **blue tits** very agitated when a **house sparrow** lingered near 'their' bird box. DMS.

**28th February** A **blackbird** seen gathering nesting materials, Johnston Avenue, Dundee. CM.

**6th March** Bill saw first **peacock butterfly** of the year near the Balmossie Fire Station. DMS.

**17th March** For the first time a **blackcap** (male) appeared in our garden on The Law, in a week when I also saw a pair of **bullfinches** twice on the **wild cherry** trees and **goldfinches** in the **ash tree**. BW.

**19th March** Found **purple saxifrage** in flower in Glen Unich. It was seen on 3rd March in Corrie Fee by Henry Taylor. AH.

**23rd March** Lots of **brittle stars** strewn across the sand by rough seas. Also a beached dead **seal**, minus its face - quite a macabre find for the grandchildren on an après Easter picnic walk along St Andrews beach. JoyC.

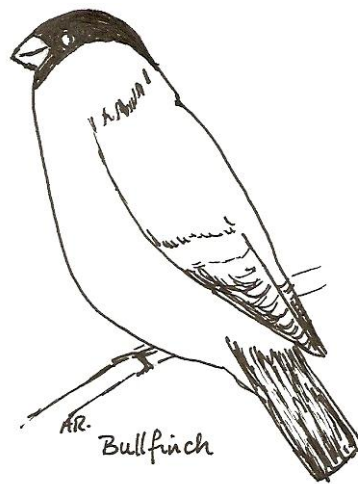
**24th March** At the Eden Estuary at high tide had good views of eight **long-tailed ducks**, a **Slavonian grebe** and about 50 **kittiwakes** - all in one field of view! BW.

**24th March** Taking my lunch to the conservatory on a very cold Easter Monday I was amazed to see a **magpie** on the grass. It stayed for some time and then came again at supper time. ME.

**27th March** A **sea eagle** (I kid you not!) seen from the ridge between Auchterhouse Hill and Balluderon, Sidlaws. JoyC.

**31st March** At last, the first butterfly of the season, a **small tortoiseshell**, seen flying high over Carnoustie in proper spring sunshine. AR.

**2nd April** A **peacock butterfly** put in an appearance in the garden, rather later than usual. Seen again the following day. AR.



- 9th April** A **red squirrel** seen dragging a rotten **banana** skin across the road at the top of the brae, Auchterhouse. JoyC.
- 13th April** A **carion crow** was struggling to break pieces off *Hydrangea petiolaris*. This presumably for its nest, but dead material might have been less resistant. DMS.  
(Our **crows** use the **lilac** and the **plum tree**. Live twigs make a stronger nest. Ed.)
- 13th April** Five **wheatears** and one **golden eagle**, seen from Duchray Hill, Spittal of Glenshee. JoyC.
- 17th April** At Bridge of Gaur (Loch Rannoch) I was standing quietly in the roadway, birdwatching, 100m from the bridge, when a **hare** crossed the bridge and came to within 5m of me before slowly entering a field. He never noticed me! BW.
- 22nd April** Our first **swallow** at Forfar Loch, with **goldcrests** nearby. AH.
- 23rd April** First **early bumblebee** (*Bombus pratorum*) was seen in the garden, with full pollen baskets. DMS.
- 10th May** **Orange tips** feeding in the garden. ME.
- 10th May** **Bee flies** (*Bombylius major*) on **violets** near Ledcreeff Loch. GM.
- 13th May** A male **orange tip**, by road leading up to Craigowl, Sidlaws. Seen while out cycling. JoyC.
- 19th May** Two **dotterel**, near summit of Glas Tulaichean, Spittal of Glenshee. JoyC.
- 20th May** In the evening, I watched a **hedgehog** crossing the back lawn of the house and then snuffling around under a **fuchsia** shrub. It's the first one in the garden that I've seen this year. JC.
- 2nd June** A family of **goldfinches** in the garden. I wonder where the nest was? ME.
- 5th June** A male **orange tip**, one of several in the garden this year. JoyC.
- 14th June** Another **hedgehog** seen in the garden in the late evening. Was this the same one as the individual seen in May? JC.
- 21st June** A walk around the mountains above Gleann Taitneach, Spittal of Glenshee was a good day for bird sightings: three **ring ouzels**, five **wheatears**, and a **ptarmigan** with approximately 15 chicks. JoyC.
- 26th June** A **cinnabar moth** on garden **thyme** in the sunshine. ME.
- 1st July** Three **crossbills** in Scots pine trees, lower track behind Auchterhouse Hill. JoyC.
- 2nd July** A **magpie** seen from the road north of Bridgefoot. The 'horsey' people said they have been seeing them, but this is the only sighting I have had despite cycling this road almost daily. JoyC.
- 6th July** A male **bullfinch** was feeding on sunflower seeds at 5.45pm. DMS.
- 24th July** A large herd of **red deer** and two **ptarmigan** with 12 chicks on the mountain above Glen Isla. (Badendon) JoyC.
- 26th July** Two **peregrine falcons** on Cox's Stack, Lochee at 10.15am. GM.
- 27th July** A **comma butterfly** seen resting on my beech hedge in Invergowrie. RA.
- 5th August** Two **sparrowhawks** overhead - one 'squeaking' to the other. Possibly a juvenile begging for food. DMS.
- 8th August** A **tawny owl** flew past me as I was sitting all alone on the summit of Craigowl, late evening. JoyC.
- 8th August** A **comma butterfly** seen at Dundee Crematorium by my son. ME.
- 10th August** A **red kite** being mobbed by two **buzzards**, Glen Moy. JoyC.
- 15th August** About 20 **geese** seen, flying low and purposefully to the south west. It wasn't possible to tell whether these were early arrivals or some of the feral **greylag** flocks which can be found all year round in the area. JP.
- 27th August** Our neighbour had seven **peacocks** and five **red admirals** on his **buddleia**. Our maximum (on 1st September) was only five **peacocks** and three **red admirals**. DMS.
- 29th August** Eight **red admirals** in my garden at Friockheim - three on the garden wall, four on a **holly** bush beside the wall and one in flight. Also two **peacocks** on *Buddleia davidii*. SG.



- 29th August** A **comma butterfly** seen on **buddleia** in a Broughty Ferry garden. PG.
- 2nd September** A **comma butterfly** in my garden. JoyC.
- 1st September** At 9.30pm a **fox** crossed the road near Hare Craig (Broughty Ferry) and then stood on the grass verge and watched the traffic. AR.
- 8th September** A **grey squirrel** walked along the low wall opposite the patio doors and vanished into the next-door garden. This was the first one seen in the garden and I hope it does not return. MP.
- 17th September** A **grey wagtail** on the wall of my back garden, 5.45pm. GM.
- 23rd September** Another **comma butterfly** in my garden, also two **long-tailed tits**. JoyC.
- 23rd October** Saw two **curlews** in playing field opposite Dawson Park, very close to the road, albeit on the other side of the wire fence. I'm not often along that stretch of road, so wouldn't know if this is common. JoyC. (Often seen on local playing fields in winter - a good opportunity for a close look, unless you are driving! Ed.)
- 24th October** A **swallow** flying low on front of the Eden Estuary hide at Guardbridge. Rather late in departing. GM.
- 26th October** **Great spotted woodpecker** in the garden for the second time recently, but I failed to note the previous visit. ME.
- 29th October** Six **long-tailed tits** in the garden. JoyC.
- 29th October** A colleague (an SWT member and a reliable observer) reported a **woodcock** at about 8.30am in the garden at Dundee College's Old Glamis Road campus. Surely, it's an unusual bird in a built-up area, although there is dense woodland in Caird Park about half a mile away. JC. (See also first entry for 12th November. Ed.)
- 1st November** Andrew Ford reported a rare sighting of the female/juvenile **hooded merganser** at Tayport boating pond at the weekend. Apparently only the third sighting of this North American species in the UK. Also 2375 **pinkfoot geese** counted at Tentsmuir point. TC.
- 3rd November** Six **buzzards** sitting in a line in a newly ploughed field, Dronley area. JoyC.
- 5th November** While watching the fireworks in Baxter Park at a little after 7.00pm, we were surprised to see a **bat** flying around in the light from the arc lamps directed over the crowds. It seemed to be a **pipistrelle** hawking for **insects**, and flitted past several times, giving close enough views to allow tentative identification. JC.
- 5th November** A **tawny owl** seen on the old Newtyle railway, between Bridgefoot and Birkhill. The following day I heard a **tawny owl** while cycling along the road parallel to the same stretch of railway. "The bird of night did sit, even at noon day, hooting and shrieking." (Shakespeare!) JoyC.
- 9th November** Flock of 20 or so **fieldfares** seen at Carsegowndiemuir Quarry. A few **redwings** were flitting about as well, feasting on **rowan** berries. JC.
- 12th November** As I walked up the path beside the Monifieth High School playing field a **woodcock** shot up from the long grass under the trees just the other side of the fence. Rather a surprising sighting. AR.
- 12th November** Over 20 **waxwings** in the garden, followed by a similar number on the 18th feeding on **rowan** (*Sorbus*) berries. Also one dead one which, unfortunately, seemed to have flown into the conservatory. BB.
- 12th November** Several **goldcrests** were seen in **Scots pine** at Kings Cross Hospital car park. I identified two through the binos although I heard and saw more flitting about with naked eye. JoyC.
- 16th November** A party of about ten **long-tailed tits** passed through the garden at lunch time. As the peanut feeder was only half full it looked like an animated ball when most of the tits jostled for position on it! AR.
- 22nd November** In the freezing cold of an early morning, a **fox** was seen trotting boldly across Strathern Road near the junction with Ellieslea Road. JC.
- 23rd November** At about 8.30am, after 3" overnight snow, Bill saw a **fox** crossing our lawn. We later followed its track along the pavement and down Castleroy Road, until it headed up a driveway. Another parallel track up the driveway was of a **deer**, which we have never seen in the area! DMS.



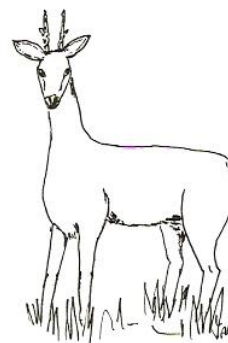


**30th November** A **great spotted woodpecker** seen perched on the razor wire surrounding the radio masts on top of Lundie Crag. Rather unusual. GM.

**2nd December** My garden looked so beautiful covered in snow today, further enhanced by countless visitors to the bird feeders, including a **great spotted woodpecker** and eight **long-tailed tits**. **Bullfinches** were very conspicuous, two males and a female, against a white background in the adjacent woods. JoyC.

**7th December** A **great spotted woodpecker** in the garden - the first in our 40 years in this house. BB.

**9th December** On a walk near Ladenford, south of Forfar, I spotted seven **roe deer** in a turnip field. Six were lying down and the seventh joined them while I watched, obviously unconcerned by my presence (two fields away) or by the car which drove past the field on a farm track. When I returned about 30 mins later all were standing grazing in the same field. While standing watching the deer I also spotted two **wrens** busily investigating the dense, twiggy "**witches brooms**" on a roadside **birch tree**. Presumably good hiding places for insects and, thus, a good food source for birds. AR.



**17th December** Woke very early on a chilly morning to hear a **robin** singing lustily. Ah, the first sign of spring to come. JC.

**22nd December** I woke up early, perhaps about 3 or 4am, to hear a flock of **oystercatchers** flying noisily around. They probably had been disturbed when roosting in the park but what had caused the fuss? Was it, perhaps, a wandering **fox** or a **dog** being walked early in the morning? JC.

**24th December** Mary and I saw an **otter** at Balgavies Loch. Nobody else about! AR.

**25th December** Had a nice view of a fox at Buddon Ness, beyond the Low Lighthouse. CM.

## CULLED FROM THE COURIER

This year seems to have more than its fair share of natural history articles in the Courier, many of which were also in the national press.

Birdwatchers headed for Montrose Basin after reports of an **avocet** which arrived in early January and stayed for several weeks. A story which got very wide coverage was the chosen nest site of a pair of **great tits** at Vane Farm. They set up home in the cigarette bin beside the door into the visitor centre, which necessitated a large notice to warn the public not to use it for the intended purpose. Four young were successfully fledged from this unusual nesting place.

Early September brought reports of **raptor** nesting success. On checking two nest boxes intended for **barn owls**, somewhere in Angus, ringer Ben Herschell found, and ringed, three **barn owl** chicks in one box but three **kestrel** chicks in the second. Another brood of barn owls used a box elsewhere in Angus, confirming that they are, indeed, becoming more common. The news of the fledging of two **golden eagle** chicks was given great prominence as the eyrie was beside the Beinn an Tuirc wind farm on the Kintyre Peninsula.

A report in April brought the unwelcome news that a **grey squirrel** had been spotted in Inverness, many miles from other known sites. The public was alerted, to monitor the situation. Another undesirable record, of alien **harlequin ladybirds** in Perthshire, was reported in February. These large ladybirds out-compete all the native species and any sightings should be recorded.

On a more cheerful note, the introduction at Broughty Ferry of plants of **sea pea**, rescued and propagated by the Dundee Botanic Garden from a threatened site in Carnoustie, made the news in mid May. It will be interesting to see how well they survive.

One of the stranger articles concerned a **unicorn**, found at a wildlife park in Italy. It was, in fact, a **roe deer** with a single antler growing from the centre of its head, allegedly due to a genetic or developmental fault. This appeared in the paper on 12th June with a very convincing photograph - I specifically checked that it was not April!

To round off the year was a short article in December describing how a Tealing farmer, when ploughing, had seen 13 **buzzards** following the plough in search of **worms**. The usual **gulls** were keeping a safe distance in the far corner of the field.

Anne Reid

## APRIL AFTERNOON IN ANGUS

On the sunny afternoon of 21st April we went for a bike ride to Montreathmont. Rolling along, we heard 'chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff' in several places. Later on, the hurried outpourings of **willow warblers** were evident. I had stopped to hear a drumming **woodpecker** when a **stoat** popped up from a dyke five feet away and stared at me for some time.

Though we had heard our first **chiffchaffs**, defying snow flurries in south west Scotland, almost three weeks before our local birds, it's always great to hear the first summer warblers in one's own patch.

Alban Houghton

## A VERY SPECIAL SSI - ST HELENA

In April 2008 we spent a week on the island of St Helena, a tiny volcanic island hundreds of miles from the nearest land mass. Due to its isolation, it has a rich endemic flora which has only recently been discovered, much of it just on the point of extinction. An article in the RHS magazine reports that there are 50 endemic species.

Local botanist George Benjamin, now in his 80s, was instrumental in identifying and saving the **ebony flower**, now the national flower of St Helena. The wood is a softer type than the **black ebony**. Intriguing local plant names have developed including **babies' toes** and **old father live-for-ever** (a type of **pelargonium**) and these plants grow in fairly inaccessible places which may help to ensure their survival.

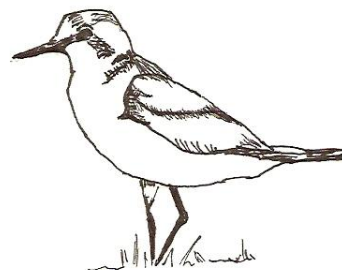
George led us on a botanical tour which was hit by torrential rain, so he commandeered the local school hall and showed us some of the **ferns** he had been quietly collecting. He received the MBE for his services to botany and allowed us to look at his beautifully illustrated copy of "The Flora of St Helena".

On another walk we saw the **fairy terns** which, as well as nesting on the rocks, here nest in trees! The very tame **peaceful dove** was another attractive species we saw, and the most delightful little **wirebird**, a type of plover endemic to the island. The **spider** list has a wealth of species with imaginative names, but we only saw a few!

The mail ship is due to be decommissioned in 2012, with no plans for a replacement, and the plans for the new airport, the construction of which faces a host of almost insurmountable difficulties, has had a "pause" declared by the Ministry of International Development. This may help to preserve the unique flora and fauna of the island, but perhaps the Islanders themselves may become an endangered species!

For anyone wishing to visit this unique SSSI, I would urge going now, while there is still a chance of reaching it.

Since returning from St Helena I have learned that a member of staff employed by the RSPB to survey the island's flora has rediscovered a type of **sedge** which has not been seen there for 200 years. It is one of the world's smallest sedges, called *Bulbostylis neglecta*, and was originally collected from the island by the English explorer William Burchell in the early



St Helena Wirebird  
*Charadrius sanctaehelenae*

1800s. Despite its rediscovery, the plant is under threat from invasive introduced grasses and may not survive long if the invaders are not controlled.

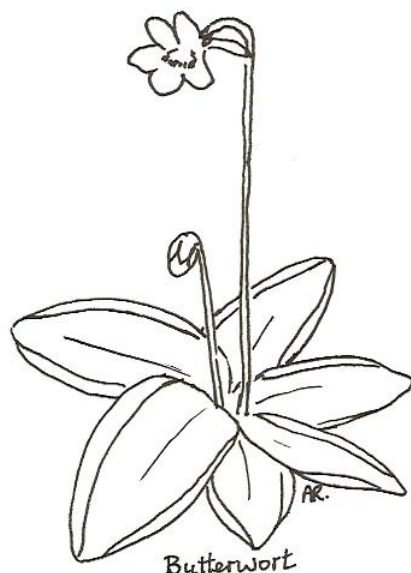
Leonore Goodliffe

## A RUM WEEKEND IN MAY

We sailed on the ferry from Mallaig on a beautiful clear day, arriving at Kinloch at the recently completed pier in Loch Scresort on the east side of Rum, full of anticipation for the wildlife that might be seen that weekend. One new building on the shoreline near the harbour I noticed was to be an otter hide. We did not see **otters** this time, but we had a superb view of **gannets** diving in the outer reaches of the sea loch later that evening from this hide! **Eider ducks, black guillemots, red-breasted mergansers, common sandpipers** and **curlews** kept us entertained at low water in the bay close to Kinloch Castle, where we stayed in hostel accommodation for the weekend.

This was my second visit to the Island of Rum. I had walked most of the Rum Cullin range on the last visit. These impressive ridges are the severely eroded remnants of the 'bowels' of an ancient volcano in which only the stratified crystalline **periodotite** formed at very high temperature inside the base of the volcano now remain. We climbed over the rock-strewn summit of Barkeval (591 m) where **thrift** (*Armeria maritima*) flowered in profusion, and then walked around Atlantic Corrie to gain relatively easy access to Trollaval (702 m), a narrow mountain ridge so named by the Vikings because of the strange noises made by **Manx shearwaters**, nesting in burrows near the summit, reminded them of the troll legends of Norway. These remarkable birds fly from Brazil each spring and only come to nesting burrows during darkness at the summit of these hills. I saw no shearwaters this time, probably because I visited the island too early in the season, but the 'shearwater flushes' of bright green grass near the burrows showed how the hillside receives regular supplies of nitrogen from these bird colonies.

We had surprise encounters with family groups of **wild goats** on three hills on Rum. These large intimidating shaggy animals with long swept-back horns watched us closely as



we picked our way through boulder-fields; I had no desire to see how fast they can run and kept a safe distance while plant hunting. On a long walk to the western hills of Orval (571 m) and Bloodstone Hill (388 m) we were delighted by the profusion of flowering plants on the hilltops and marshes; **mountain everlasting, primrose, marsh violet, heath spotted orchid, butterwort, sundew, milkwort, purple saxifrage, least willow** and **juniper** on the scree slopes. Whilst sitting on the edge of the precipitous cliffs of Bloodstone Hill looking across the Canna Sound to Sanday and Canna, we watched **gannets** cruising above the ocean below; then the excitement as an **eagle**, probably a juvenile **sea eagle**, glided past with a wing span larger than a gannet! The return walk took us close to a pair of **golden plovers** patrolling a rocky outcrop, so we took special care not to stumble on a nest or chicks. **Green hairstreak butterflies** were very common on the warm sunny walk along Glen Shellesder back to Kinloch. The most tantalising noise I heard that

weekend turned out to be a family of **herons** secluded in a huge nest high in a pine tree by the harbour. They made a mechanical beak-rattling sound most unlike any bird I have ever heard!

Brian Williamson

## MANDARINS ON THE TAY - THE SEQUEL

As an addition to my article on the mandarin duck in the 2007 Bulletin (page 41), I have gleaned more information from printed sources and from Mark Simmons at Perth Museum. Surprisingly, the duck is recorded as having been introduced to this country before 1745 and, though no details are available, I would guess that it would have been to one or more private estates.

The **mandarin duck** was admitted to the British and Irish Bird List in 1971. Its stronghold in the UK is in Buckinghamshire and Windsor Great Park. There are populations in north and west Scotland, on the River Tay and on the River Eye in Berwickshire. These two are of interest, being far removed from the other populations. Conflicting information from Perth says they nearly died out in the late 1980s, but breeding records say there were 100 birds on the Tay in the late 80s. It has been estimated that the population in the UK could now exceed that in the Orient.

The birds are often seen where **rhododendron** overhangs the water's edge, which ties in with my sighting on the Tay. Unusually for a duck (but see **goldeneye**), they nest in trees, sometimes as much as 15m from the ground. Their feeding habits are also unusual as they eat **aquatic invertebrates** for much of the year, but change to **acorns**, **chestnuts** and **beech mast** in autumn and winter. There has been some concern in recent times on conflict with **goldeneye** (a rare breeder in this country) for nest holes, but I think this threat has been overstated. I, for one, would be appalled at any threat of control of the **mandarin duck**, especially considering its scarcity in its native habitat.

Gordon Maxwell

(Providing extra nest boxes might remove competition. Ed.)

## INNER HEBRIDES HOPPING

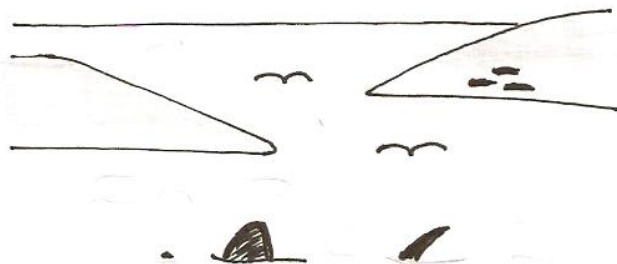
Six members of the Grampian Club boarded the MV Mary Doune in Mallaig with skipper, Andy, and cook, Anita, on May 10th. We landed on 11 islands, of which Jura was the furthest south, and one lighthouse (Skerry Vor). The seas were calm, the sun shone and we saw lots of wildlife – **corncrakes**, **cuckoos**, **choughs**, **cetaceans** and a **basking shark**.

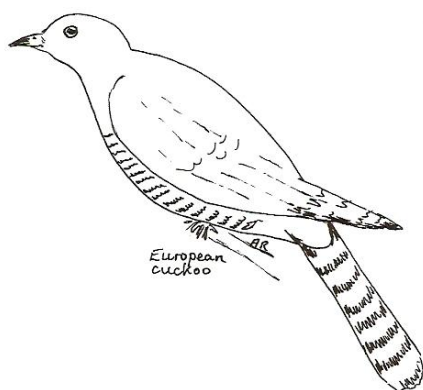
We were moored by Lunga (Treshnish Isles) on a flat sea surrounded by wee islets. It was an idyllic, warm, peaceful evening after a very agreeable dinner. **Grey seals** sang to us, **fulmars** chuckled from the cliffs, **puffins** and **kittiwakes** flew by. Then we had a languid visit from a **basking shark**, scooping up **copepods** - the large dorsal fin was followed by a sinuously sweeping tail and an occasional glimpse of a snout. Later, Anita treated us to some fine fiddle-playing with our cocoa - other beverages had been consumed earlier, of course.

Lunga itself is lovely - a regular boat crosses from Iona.

There are spectacular sea bird colonies and the whole island is covered in **bluebells**, **celandine** and **primroses** with plentiful **roseroot** and **early purple orchids**. Several **snipe** were drumming over their territories and **rock pipits** were parachuting over theirs. Other islands had fine displays of **spring squill**, **thrift** and, the **corncrake's** favourite skulking-cover, **yellow iris**.

**Corncrakes** were heard or seen on five islands including Oronsay, where the RSPB warden declared Ben Oronsay (93m) out-of-bounds since **choughs** were nesting there. Their stronghold, Islay, is not far as this 'commendable crow' flies. **Cuckoos** were heard most days





and nights. One Colonsay **cuckoo** was pursued by a justifiably furious **meadow pipit**! Sea sightings included rafts of **manx shearwaters**, **great-northern loon** and a pair of wailing **red-throated loons** (loon is the newish international name for a **diver**).

As we returned to Mallaig a pod of **common dolphins** played around the boat. There were **bottle-nosed dolphins** and **porpoise** near Iona too. My next week was based at Doune in Knoydart and a **minke whale** showed not far away on our way to Canna.

Several arctic-alpines are present on the Beinn Bhuidhe ridge above Cleadale, Eigg. A north to south traverse along the ridge is very rewarding - **mountain avens**, **moss campion**, **mountain everlasting** and **early purple orchids** grow well on the basalt. There is much more of interest on the islands including geology, land and seascapes and historic settlements. Going west in May is definitely recommended.

Alban Houghton

Note: This trip was the reason that Alban did not lead the Balgavies Loch evening outing (see page 11), but volunteered Liz to do it for him! I think you will agree that it was too good an opportunity for him to miss. Ed.

## RUSTS ON MOUNTAIN WILLOWS

During a walk early in June with Alban Houghton on Fraoch-bheinn (790m) near Glenfinnan, seeking *Diapensia lapponica* in flower, we came across **least willow** (*Salix herbacea*) infected by the rust *Melampsora epitea* with bright yellow-orange pustules (**uredinia**) on the stems. Like many rusts, *Melampsora* spp. alternate between two host plants to complete their life cycles (behaviour described as **heteroecious**, in contrast to those infecting only a single host described as **autoecious**). Uredinia were first collected on *S. herbacea* in Britain by Wheldon & Wilson (1911) and the same rust has subsequently been collected on a number of mountains in Central and Northern Scotland at altitudes usually over 800 m.

The taxonomy and biology of this genus on alpine willows is complicated! (For details see Wilson, M. & Henderson, D.M. (1966) British Rust Fungi, Cambridge University Press). There are two forms of *Melampsora epitea*: one is *M. epitea* var. *reticulata* that alternates mainly between **reticulate willow** (*Salix reticulata*) and **yellow mountain saxifrage** (*Saxifraga aizoides*) - upon which it forms the **spermagonia** and **aecia** earlier in the season. However, *M. epitea* var. *epitea* has been shown experimentally to form its early stages on **purple saxifrage** (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*). Other alpine willow species can probably also serve as a host for this rust; for example the **woolly willow** (*Salix lanata*) bearing this fungus has been collected from Corrie Fee, and from Glen Callater in the past.

Brian Williamson

## TRIP TO COIRE BONHARD, GLEN CLOVA

Coire Bonhard lies to the north west of Clova, hidden from the glen by the bulging grassy slopes of sheep pastures. A warm, sunny day in July saw myself and the BSBI Plant Recorder for Angus, Barbara Hogarth, botanising our way up these slopes en route for Coire Bonhard. The **grass** gradually gives way to **heather** and wet moorland and the panoramic view of the wide open corrie, with large rocky outcrops interspersed with steep grassy gullies and diagonal ramps, becomes apparent.



We commenced our diligent searches at the western end and gradually made our way eastward through the cliffs using grassy rakes for passage. This corrie, which has a certain reputation for having a good collection of arctic/alpine plants, was somewhat disappointing. The rocks here are **gneisses** of a rather acidic nature and lacking in good seepages and useful nutrients. Having a southern aspect and being relatively dry we found mainly grasses with ericaceous plants growing on the rock faces. It was interesting to a degree but not full of arctic/alpine plants.

By late afternoon we had succeeded in reaching the eastern end of the corrie and stopped at a burn. Here there was a noticeable change in the flora and a sudden appearance of banks of *Salix lapponum* (**Lapland willow**) in the upper reaches of the burn. We dumped our sacks and threaded our way along the watercourse. The rock here was obviously calcareous **micaceous schist**. The slopes were well covered in **saxifrages**, including **yellow** (*Saxifraga aizoides*), **mossy** (*S. hypnoides*), **starry** (*S. stellaris*), **purple** (*S. oppositifolia*) and **alpine** (*S. nivalis*). **Alpine speedwell** (*Veronica alpina*) was found near the burn. **Moonwort** (*Botrychium lunaria*) and **lesser clubmoss** (*Selaginella selaginoides*) were growing together on ledges. **Hoary whitlow grass** (*Draba incana*), **mountain sorrel** (*Oxyria digyna*), **holly fern** (*Polystichum lonchitis*) and **green spleenwort** (*Asplenium trichomanes ramosum*) were all present. **Alpine cinquefoil** (*Potentilla cranzii*) was in full flower. There were many other species, of course, but this was a good flavour of our less common upland plants.

Unfortunately, we had run out of time and had to leave. This section of rock, which is quite small, is well worth another, longer visit. For the day we recorded around 200 plants including the little **sedge** *Carex dioica* (**dioecious sedge**) which had not been recorded in this 10km square before.

Pat Gaff

## COMMA BUTTERFLY IN DUNDEE

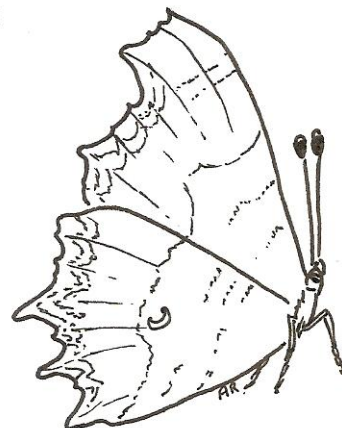
2008 was another bad year for insects with some recorders reporting one of the worst summers ever for moths. However around August and September there was a warm period which saw the arrival of the **comma butterfly**, *Polygonia c-album*, in Dundee. A number were seen during the summer by Dundee Nats members. (See Interesting Sightings section, pages 28 & 29, for records. Ed.) This distinctive orange and brown butterfly has a ragged edge to its wings and a characteristic white comma-shaped mark on its under wing.

The butterfly has been migrating northwards and it was only a matter of time before it crossed the Tay. The comma has increased its range by 200 kilometres in the last 60 years. Not only has it bucked the trend of declines, it is the fastest expanding butterfly in the UK. Yet only sixty years ago it was on the verge of extinction in the UK. So what caused its remarkable comeback?

Research carried out by Jane Hill and Brigitte Braschler of the University of York has pieced together the story. The research was only possible because of long term observations of British butterflies, many of them having been carried out by members of societies like the Dundee Naturalists'.

At the start of the 19th century the comma was common all over England, then it started to decline and by 1920 it was found in only two places in Herefordshire. The decline of the butterfly can be related to the decline in the food plant of its caterpillars, **hops**. Hops were once grown all over the UK but hop production gradually declined. Also at the start of the 20th century there was a slight cooling of the climate which led to the decline of a number of butterflies.

Since the 1940s the climate has been warming, but not all butterflies that declined at the end of the 19th century have recovered like the comma. As hops are not grown anymore there has to be another explanation for the expansion. In fact the caterpillar of the comma switched food plants to **nettles** and the **wych**



**elm.** Hill and Braschler showed that with an increase in temperature, the caterpillars grew better on wych elm, followed by nettles and in fact hops became a poorer host plant as temperatures increased. Both wych elm and nettles are widespread in the north. It shows that the comma, now a generalist feeder, does better than some of the butterflies with more restricted requirements. As some of our more familiar butterflies decline, we can look forward to more general feeding butterflies, such as the **Essex skipper**, heading northwards.

David Lampard

## AUTUMN CROCUSES

There they were, hundreds of small six-petalled flowers, rose-lilac in colour, dotted all over the pasture. We were in the Cirque d'Estaubé, in the Pyrenees near the Spanish border, in September and not expecting any floral displays. One thought of the gardener's **autumn crocus** (*Colchicum autumnale*) but Don, who knew his botany, observed that true crocuses (*Crocus* sp.) had only three stamens per bloom whilst these had six. Back at base the flowers were identified as **merendera** (*Merendera pyrenaica*). Like the authentic autumn crocus the leaves appear in spring and die back before flowering in the later months. We also came across the true **autumn crocus** (*Colchicum*, six stamens) in the same area, similar in colour but with the projecting flower stem that merendera lacked. They both made a fine display though neither are really proper crocuses (*Crocus* sp.).

Jack Moody

## FORFAR LOCH FISHER

2nd October

To ease the drag of the weekly shop, we often have a walk round Forfar Loch first. We had been pleased to see a pristine **peacock butterfly** and a male **common darter dragonfly** as we walked. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of something dark, but rather larger than a **duck**, diving down. We waited, and up came an **otter**. It is hard to be sure, but probably a dog otter. He knew we were there, and looked intently towards us several times, before diving again. We watched him for a full half hour and followed him up the loch. He caught a good few **fish**, about one dive in three was successful. The little ones he just swallowed down, but with a bigger catch he rolled over onto his back in the traditional pose to chew it, holding it with his front paws. As he neared the reeds at the end, he set up a **heron** who told him off in what I suspect were very rude terms. Undaunted he paddled around a bit in the shallows before vanishing into the reeds. Incidentally, there were regular sightings of one or two **otters** at Balgavies Loch throughout the summer.

Liz Houghton

## GOLDEN EAGLES OVER CUL BEAG

Early October

On the steep climb up the west side of Cul Beag in the Inverpolly Nature Reserve north of Ullapool as the rain cleared and fair weather, with a stiff wind, spread from the northwest, I saw the characteristic anchor-shaped silhouette of a **peregrine falcon** swoop over our heads and thought this was going to be a special day!

As we climbed, the splendid landscape of all the famous Inverpolly Hills was revealed, Stac Pollaidh to the west, and Cul Mor and Suilven to the north. In the northwest, Conival and Ben More Assynt were capped with a new snow cover. As we gained the summit of Cul Beag a skein of about 50 **pink-footed geese** did a fly-past to welcome us, but the real surprise occurred during the descent when two **golden eagles** came around the hillside



within a hundred yards of us. One was a second-year juvenile with a large white patch on each upper wing and it came close enough for us to see his magnificent head and sharp beak.

Brian Williamson

## URBAN WILDLIFE

During my membership of the Nats, I have seen a wide variety of wildlife in a wide variety of habitats. This small contribution, however, covers a very limited area, namely my front and rear doors and the street where I live in the Lochee area.

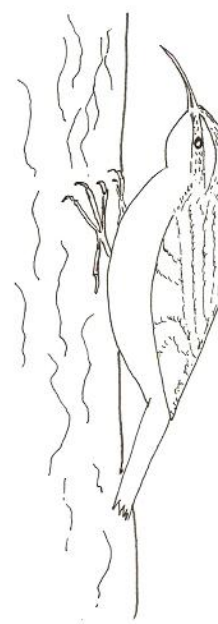
Over the years the usual garden visitors have turned up, such as **blackbird**, **song thrush**, **dunnock** and **woodpigeon** with the odd **hedgehog** and **grey squirrel** and even a **great spotted woodpecker**, in addition to all the usual smaller garden birds.

2008 has been a bit more unusual, especially concerning avian records. On 3rd January there were two **treecreepers** on a **sycamore** 10 yards from my front door. The commotion of two **lesser black-backed gulls** screaming over my back garden on 5th April made me go outside and I was just in time to see a **buzzard** pursued by the gulls over the garden and round the side of the house next door. The conflict was no doubt due to the fact that the gulls were rearing two chicks on the roof of a nearby house. A **mistle thrush**, an uncommon bird on my patch, was seen on a TV aerial on a house across from me on 9th May and on 17th September two **grey wagtails** appeared, one on my phone wire and one on the roof next door (and not a drop of water in sight).

On 24th August, after reading into the early hours of the morning, I peeped through the curtains just before going to bed and saw what looked like a large **dog** coming from a large grassed area where a multi-storey once stood. The 'hound' appeared to be unaccompanied and, as I watched, it came onto the pavement and under the street lights. The 'hound' was actually a **roe buck** and, at one point, was about to go up a close into the tenement opposite. At that point I opened the front door and shouted across to it "What are you doing here?" whereupon it stared at me for a few seconds then turned and headed back from whence it came, which was probably Camperdown Park or Templeton Woods. This was just as well as roe buck can be very dangerous when cornered and have very sharp antlers.

I would like to end my tale by saying that the above is not meant to encourage Nats to become couch potatoes! Just keep coming on the bus outings.

Gordon Maxwell



## EASY SIGHTING

A young **sparrowhawk** has found the new assistance marker poles along Arbroath cliffs very handy perches. He is obviously used to people walking along and let us get quite close before flying off, flying low over the field. Minutes later, he struggled up over the cliff carrying a **pigeon**, quite a load for a small bird. The path was quite busy, and he had to move his dinner twice while we watched. I just hope he finally found peace to eat it.

Liz Houghton

## THE SWANNIE PONDS IN NOVEMBER

Unusually, a **mallard** was seen with ten chicks on 1st November. By the 11th there was only one youngster remaining, and a happy-looking **heron** in the vicinity. It had apparently been seen stalking the chicks.

There were **goosanders** on the ponds for most of the month, through until mid December, with a maximum count of nine - five males and four females. These handsome birds often visit the ponds at this time of year and it is easy to get excellent views of them there.

Bede Pounder

## A SIGHT OF THE CRAB

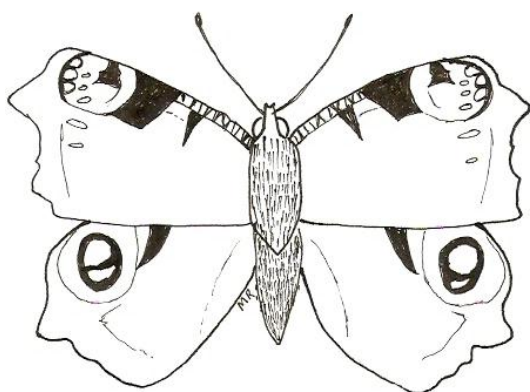
2nd November

I had watched the late night programme 'Sky at Night', still featuring the veteran broadcaster, Patrick Moore, when they described in detail how to locate the **crab nebula**. It is the gassy remnant of a star that exploded in the year 1054 AD and was reported by Chinese astronomers, although not recorded in dark-age Europe. It forms a spectacular sight in a large telescope, the glowing gas cloud gaining its name from the early descriptions and drawings of a vaguely crab-like shape by the Earl of Rosse. He had made his observations in the mid-19th century, using his massive but unwieldy telescope (then the largest in the world) at Birr Castle in central Ireland. I'd attempted to observe it myself several times in the past but without success.

Afterwards I went out with a pair of binoculars and was rewarded with one of those rather unusual crystal clear evenings. The wind had died away completely and the clear still conditions meant that visibility was excellent. **Sirius** glittered to the south and **Canopus** shone strongly nearly overhead. I was able to see, out of the corner of my eye, the faint glow of the great **nebula of Andromeda** and even counted more than seven stars in the **Pleiades** star cluster. The 'seeing' was exceptional!

I turned the binoculars over towards the constellation of **Taurus**, the bull, above the well-known shape of **Orion**, and followed the instructions from the programme. To my delight, there it was, small, faint and indistinct, but exactly in the position described. For the first time I'd been able to pick out the remnants of an exploded star with binoculars. Isn't astronomy amazing and wonderful? And to top the moment, an instant later a bright **meteor** shot across the sky from the south-west.

Jim Cook



## NOVEMBER BUTTERFLY

On the evening of 10th November a **peacock butterfly** appeared in my living room, flying like a moth to the light. It eventually went to the kitchen where it settled on the ceiling. Next day I couldn't find the butterfly, but about a week later I discovered it in the corner of the window. I carefully put it in a plastic cup and transferred it to the shed to hibernate for the winter. Hopefully it will be safe until spring.

Dorothy Fyffe

## MONTREATHMONT FOREST

Montreathmont Forest covers an area of approximately 15 square kilometres. This has been planted with conifers, mainly **Scots pine** (*Pinus sylvestris*), but also smaller blocks of **larch**, **Sitka spruce** and **Norway spruce**. There are small areas of **birch** of both native species, plus hybrids, and **alder**.

Much of this area was originally *Calluna/Deschampsia* moorland and this still exists, in places, but modified to a degree. Barbara Hogarth (BSBI plant recorder for Angus) and I, with some original misgivings, decided to check these woods for a more complete plant record for the area. Being commercial forestry, we did not think that this area would be of any great interest as most commercial forests carry a poor flora. However, our view soon changed and we have now recorded over 340 plants, some of them new to Angus.

The tracks through the forest have acted as arteries for conveying new plants such as: **slender rush** (*Juncus tenuis*), **birdsfoot** (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), **trailing St John's wort** (*Hypericum humifusum*), **small cudweed** (*Filago minima*), **common cudweed** (*Filago vulgaris*), **heath cudweed** (*Gnaphalium sylvaticum*), **red bartsia** (*Odontites vernus*) and **hoary willowherb** (*Epilobium parviflorum*).

Gardeners dumping garden waste have added considerably to the flora with more colourful plants that appear to have adapted to their new environment including **aquilegia**, **monkshood**, **crocosmias**, **pampas grass**, *Carex pendula*, *Alchemilla mollis* and **bulrush** and there is a large area covered with *Hedera colchica* (**Persian ivy**).

Birds have served as vectors for **Danish elder** (*Sambucus racemosa*) and **elder** (*S. nigra*), **tutsan** (*Hypericum androsaemum*), **holly** (*Ilex aquifolium*), **Himalayan cotoneaster** (*Cotoneaster simonsii*) and **prickly heath** (*Gaultheria mucronata* or *Pernettya mucronata*).

We have found plants, presumably remnants of the former moorland, which were unexpected such as **melancholy thistle** (*Cirsium heterophyllum*), **stagshorn clubmoss** (*Lycopodium clavatum*) (this plant is supposed to be common, our findings are that it is actually scarce in Angus), **interrupted clubmoss** (*Lycopodium annotinum*) which is normally an upland species and occurs here at only 70 to 80 metres above sea level, **lemon-scented fern** (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) and **sundew** (*Drosera rotundifolia*).

Our work in the forest is on-going and will be for some time. Considering we have only visited this area between October and March for the past two years, we are more than pleased with the results so far. I have not been able to find very much information covering the previous uses of this land. The Statistical Accounts held in Dundee are not a great deal of help. If anyone has any useful information I would be happy to hear it.

Finally, I should mention birds. From the point of view of the 'birdy' folk, forestry has added greatly to the interest of this area. There is a new bird hide from which can be observed, at very close quarters, a number of forest-living birds. The forest holds such species as **woodcock**, **goshawk**, **crossbill** and two species of **woodpecker**. **Jays** are plentiful and I have seen flocks of **redpoll** and **siskin**. **Bullfinches** can be seen all year and there is plenty more to see.

More people should explore this area - there are many tracks, and the **fungi** are crying out for examination. Any takers?

Pat Gaff



Note: The Nats New Year walk in January 2009 was in this area. A report will be in next year's Bulletin. Ed.

## FOXES AND BUZZARDS ENJOY FEATHERED LUNCH

At the Eden Estuary Hide at Guardbridge we watched with surprise as a **fox** snatched a **duck** from the shore and carried it off into a **gorse** bush for lunch. Then another **fox** came

calling. Would there be a confrontation, or a welcome? The second fox didn't have a taste of the duck, but no dispute occurred.

Meanwhile, across the river Eden, on the Coble Shore, a **buzzard** was plucking a catch. The buzzard carried its prey across the river towards us, and back to the far side of the river to continue its meal, only to be challenged by another buzzard. Superb wing-spreading behaviour above the catch signalled ownership as the interrupted meal was completed in constant competition. This was a most rewarding late November day at the hide, with a **kingfisher** putting in an appearance twice and all the usual **ducks, gulls** and **waders**.

Brian Williamson

## AN ELUSIVE GULL

Saturday 13th December

Dorothy had said that all we needed to do was go along the esplanade to the area around the lay-by and the small transport café and we'd see it. Couldn't miss it, she said. It was drizzling steadily, though, and we'd been hanging around for an hour, so where was the American visitor? I'd seen, almost as soon as we arrived, a bird about the size of a **common gull** sitting on a distant lamp-post which could have been our quarry. It was beyond binocular range, however, and the bird soon flew off and disappeared.

We were all fed up and decided to revive our spirits with coffee from the transport café. On the spur of the moment I also bought a poke of chips. We ate a few and broke up the rest to use as bait. The idea was to attract a screaming melee of the ever-watchful and hungry **black-headed gulls** and they in turn would bring in the rare visitor. The ploy worked a treat. No sooner were the black-headed gulls wheeling around than 'it' suddenly appeared on the sea wall right next to me. The bird was so close, in fact, that I didn't need binoculars to see the silver-grey back, a body a little larger than a common gull but smaller than a **herring gull**, a conspicuously dark eye-ring and a yellow beak with a distinct black ring around it. Wonderful, my first **ring-billed gull**!! It's a rare vagrant from north America, apparently only the third or fourth record for Scotland. But why had it ended up here on the Tay estuary, of all places?

Other people in the cars parked along the road seemed totally oblivious of the spectacle but another pair of birders soon turned up, armed to the teeth with binoculars, telescopes, tripods and digital cameras. They too absorbed the drama avidly and admired the bird, all the while photographing every move. Within a short time, they reported that they'd taken over a hundred images. I asked whether they were local or had come a long distance. No, they'd only travelled from Cumbria, just south of Carlisle! That morning? "Yes, we started off at six", came the reply. They must be keen! "Who found it?", they asked. I replied "Bob McCurley", and was a little surprised when one of them said "Ah yes, I know him". On reflection, though, in the bird world who doesn't know him, it seems?

And yes, although the ring-billed gull was rather hesitant and a little shy, it did manage to snatch one or two of the chips. I recommend them as bait.

Jim Cook

## WAXWINGS COME TO DUNDEE FOR CHRISTMAS

Christmas week 2008 was brightened by the arrival of about 25 **waxwings** that set up daily camp in the top of a mature **beech** tree in Adelaide Place, Dundee. On inspection I found that they were feeding on berries of an ornamental *Sorbus* tree in the garden below. Several **redwings**, a **mistle thrush** and **bullfinch** also visited this tree. I will be watching out next Christmas for this treat in our street.

Brian Williamson

