

# **DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

## **ANNUAL BULLETIN No 34**

### **2009**

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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, Mary Reid, Christine Reid, Bede Pounder 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 Jim Cook, Colin Reid and Mary Reid proof reading and helpful comments (Mary 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. I am considering the inclusion of good quality photographs in the next issue, but this will depend on cost and logistics.

Anne Reid

# SOCIETY REPORTS

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2009

The Society has had another successful year with a full programme of events. We have generally kept to our trusted pattern, but slowly adapt it over time.

The winter talk season has been interesting and often colourful. We now use mainly digital projection, which is fortunate, as the University no longer provides a slide projector following the refurbishment of room T9. I am grateful to Council members, and in particular Anne Reid, for guiding us through the ever-changing procedures in the University lecture theatres.

Memorable indoor events have included talks featuring visits from live animals, including polecats and bats. There was a joint lecture with four other societies given by Eric McCabe on Antarctica and this was particularly well attended. Members' night, ably hosted by Brian Allan, is always well supported and varied. We also continue to have more social events and Kim Eberst and Lorna Ward ran a very enjoyable social evening in February.

The outings programme went very well with the usual wide range of venues, and, on the whole, the weather on our days was rather better than the summer average (or do I have rose-coloured spectacles?) My thanks go to Davie Stein for arranging the transport.

The weather for our May weekend at Inverurie was especially good, and some of us were treated to a splendid view of leaping salmon at Banchory, as well as the howling gale (in unbroken sunshine) on the summit of Bennachie. In addition to the formal programme, Jim Cook ran a valuable series of extra evening events and he also continues to manage the Carsegowniemuir reserve. We also attended the Seashore Festival at Broughty Ferry where David Lampard's seaweed exhibit and Kim Eberst's bird quiz generated a lot of local interest.

Our membership numbers are about the same as before and we have been pleased to welcome some new members over the year. Please encourage your friends and acquaintances to come to our events.

The new Dundee Nats website is up and running and we must thank David Lampard and his group who arranged this. This can be found at [www.dundeenats.org.uk](http://www.dundeenats.org.uk). The Bulletin continues to be a splendid production and we are grateful to Anne Reid, the editor, and to all the contributors.

This year we were sorry to hear of the deaths of Frances Towns and Bob McLeod.

As always, I wish to thank the Council members for all their work over the year. Marjorie Gillan and Gordon Maxwell joined us as new members and we thanked Peter Ellis and Sheila Brinkley who came to the end of their terms of office. We are grateful to Alex Rollo for his work as Secretary until earlier in the year and welcome Lorna Ward who has taken over. Dorothy Fyffe, our treasurer, has kept a wise eye on our finances and Margaret McLaren has overseen our membership. Finally I thank all our members for their enthusiasm and support.

Brian Ballinger

## TECHNICAL CONVENOR'S REPORT

The weather this year was a little better for the spring recording evenings. Two of the meetings were particularly interesting. A very successful outing in mid May took a considerable party (22 members and friends) along to near the disused Tayport lighthouse along the south shore of the Tay, starting from the Bridge car park. The usual collection of small ruderal plants was all too abundant along the roadside but we soon left the road to walk along the path and then down towards the water. In damp places, clumps of **hemlock water dropwort** thrived, along with **watercress**, **water forget-me-nots** and **hoary willowherb** (with the delightfully appropriate English common name of **codlins and cream**). On the shore itself, **lyme grass** patches, **oraches** and **sandwort** struggled among the pebbles and boulders. On the few rocky areas, a few tiny **sedges** and small clumps of **sea plantain** could be seen and tufts of **sea pink** splashed the brown lichen-covered rocks with colour. In one place a few shoots of **arrowgrass** were found. The bird life, however, was rather sparse. A few groups of **oystercatchers** flew piping overhead and one or two **redshank** rose in protest

as we walked along the shore. Offshore were small numbers of **eiders** and **mallards**, along with a few **gulls**, and further out one or two diving **cormorants** could be seen. Most of the party turned back as the evening wore on but Brian Williamson and Pat Gaff made it all the way to the lighthouse before turning up to the main road.

A smaller but equally keen group visited the Western Cemetery in late May, on the look-out for interesting plants, insects and birds but particularly to search for **hoary plantain**. We were joined at the gate by Lorna Ward, her visiting daughter and interested grand-children to help in the search. In the event, no effort was needed; the plant was found in the grassy edge of the bed right in front of the gate! The pale mauve anthers and the generally hairy broad leaves were used in the identification. Perhaps our success this time was due to the earlier time of year, before the mowers had been used to any effect.

Although, fairly obviously, the site is heavily managed we still found a wide selection of short-grass plants along the wall lines in the less tidy corners. Several **speedwells** and **trefoils**, **hart's tongue fern**, **pellitory of the wall**, **maidenhair** and **wall spleenworts** and **wall rue** all turned up. The most interesting area, though, was the unkempt zone right at the top of the cemetery, with clumps of **wallflower**, **honesty**, **dame's violet**, various colours of **Spanish bluebell** (but no native bluebells, alas), **nettles** and **brambles**, trailing **roses**, **willows** and **hawthorn**



forming a riotous tangle. In fact, the vegetation was so dense in places that it was almost impossible to push through without a machete. By this time the lowering sun allowed an evening chill to settle and the party was glad to get back to the warmth of our cars.

Several visits were made in late summer to the rocks and rock pools at Easthaven, led by David Lampard and ably assisted by Kim Eberst. A most interesting array of littoral animals and plants were caught and identified.

The other surveying activity of the year was in helping a young graduate, Laura Duffy, to make a record during the summer of all the best sites in the grounds of Dundee University and their associated plants, insects and birds. Anne Reid and I organised two visits with her, to advise on identification problems, in rather mixed conditions (including time spent sheltering under trees from passing downpours). A further visit without her was made to the back of the Perth Road buildings and this turned out to be very productive. Anne Reid and David Lampard also spent an evening moth trapping in the University grounds. It is hoped that our small contributions will help the University to keep a track of their own biodiversity.

Jim Cook

## CARSEGOWNIEMUIR CONVENOR'S REPORT

Once again, it's been a busy year at the Quarry. In late winter one Sunday afternoon was spent planting the trees remaining from the autumn planting session. A total of 14 trees were planted in the 2008-09 season, mostly **ash** originally obtained as small weak seedlings from Ronnie Young and grown up to healthy size (roughly 1m in height) in good garden soil. Over the years, experience has shown that ash does well in the varied but tough conditions of the quarry and generally thin soils and also does a fine job in eventually suppressing the **willowherb**.

Several visits were made in spring to monitor and enjoy the area. As soon as the willowherb was tall enough to pose a threat to the youngest trees, a few visits were made to pull the offending plants and use them to mulch the small trees. On the same occasions, our new two-stroke brasher was used to clear the paths. Although noisy and at times awkward to use, this little machine is a great labour-saver. All the paths were opened out to a minimum of two metres width (so that they are still passable when wet) and the main paths were cleared to a standard of three to four metres to allow for willowherb collapsing onto the line of the

path. The time taken totalled only one full man-day of work, although it was hard and sweaty. The road-side to the cottage was also cleared.

The barbecue in August went very well, even if the numbers attending were rather fewer than on previous occasions. (See the report on page 20. Ed.) However, a number set to with a will to pull areas of **ragwort**, just to work up an appetite for the culinary delights to come. Several areas were cleared very effectively.

Because of the wet weather in late summer, though, some major areas of ragwort infestation was not cleared until it was well into flowering and even starting to set seed. Although ragwort produces copious supplies of nectar (and perhaps pollen) to attract and support a variety of flies, moths and butterflies, the toxic nature of the foliage means that it poses a considerable threat to grazing cattle and, especially, to horses. Instead of spraying with herbicides we try to pull it to suppress the production of seeds. In parts of the quarry, this strategy has had a considerable effect. However, in the central hollow between ponds 4 and 5 the ragwort seems as abundant as ever. Perhaps the dip in the ground and the damp soil encourage the parachuting seeds to land there and germinate. It took 4 to 5 man-hours of continuous pulling to clear the area. The ragwort was gathered into large piles in an attempt to prevent the seed from blowing around. A few weeks later, when it was dry, the piles were set on fire and the seed-heads and their thousands of seeds destroyed.

In early December, Colin Sinclair, a new member, provided some very welcome and much-needed muscle in helping to plant this autumn's crop of small trees. Instead of the six planned, a total of 10 trees were brought up and all were planted, a mixture of **ash** and **birch**. Three extra holes had to be dug, no mean feat in the time available when only a pick can make a difference in the rock-ridden soil. A few places were left untouched, as sites for future planting of hazels to line the path. Not every trip there is as labour-intensive, though, but nearly always the quarry is a very pleasant place to visit and there's always the chance of a good wildlife sighting.

Jim Cook

## OBITUARIES

### BOB MCLEOD

Bob McLeod, long term Nats member and former active committee member, died on 10th February, aged 96. He was born in Monifieth and followed his father into a career with D C Thomson. He joined the Evening Telegraph as an office boy, and worked his way up through the company to become night news editor of The Courier before his retiral in October 1977. He continued to contribute to the paper's Craigie column for many years after he left the firm, often on subjects of wildlife interest.

Throughout his life he was very fond of the outdoors, and was a keen walker, hosteller and golfer, as well as a volunteer for many community and nature groups. During the second world war, he served with the RAF regiment in Egypt and Malta, before being redeployed to the Black Watch. He moved to Dundee in 1959, after his marriage to Pat Woolley, a PE teacher.

During 20 years as honorary forester to the Scout Association's Douglaswood Camp, he planted several thousand new trees and helped found the Dundee Tree Group. As a long-serving chairman of the Tree Group, he helped promote the planting and protection of trees throughout the city. Backmuir Woods, Brighty Wood at Gagie, and Huntly Wood at Longforgan were all saved by the Woodland Trust after the Tree Group and many others contributed funds. He wrote a booklet on the history of the Tree Group, 'First Leaves', and also gave lectures to schools and local community groups.

Bob was an active member of several other local wildlife organisations, and edited the Dundee Naturalists' Society annual Bulletin for 10 years. He was also chairman of the Dundee Art Galleries and Museums Association, during a period in which the association took an increasingly active role in fund-raising.

With Pat, his wife, Bob was a long-time member of Gilfillan Memorial Church in Whitehall Crescent, for which he wrote the brief history. They later joined Williamson Memorial Unitarian Christian Church. Through sales of plants and crafts, and by collecting

aluminium cans for recycling, the couple raised many thousands of pounds for the two churches and other charities, including the RSPB, WWF, and Friends of the Earth.

Colin McLeod

#### FRANCES TOWNS

Sadly, one of our longest-serving members, Frances Towns, passed away quietly on 16th October 2009. She had celebrated her 90th birthday in December 2006 and, until very recently, was looking after herself in her own flat not far from the Lochee Road. In fact, one of our members met Frances in the city library and then in the local supermarket as recently as September '09. She was a keen birdwatcher and botanist and a very regular attendee on the weekend trips and Saturday bus excursions, her last excursion being in 2006. Frances always said that she greatly enjoyed the activities and friendship of the Society; her quiet nature and pawky sense of humour endearing her to many. She also was an active member of the CHA (now Tayside Walkers) and the local RSPB group.

Frances served as a member of the DNS Council from 1980, becoming treasurer in 1982 and holding the post until 1987. With her background in accountancy, she was much valued as our auditor of accounts, which task she fulfilled admirably for many years after her stint on the Council. Her numerous contributions included volunteering for and leading a variety of outings and helping to organise the very successful weekend to Strathpeffer in 1981.

Although small of stature, Frances had a stout heart. She will be much missed by her many friends.

Dorothy Fyffe

#### ALF ROBERTSON

Although not a member of DNS Alf Robertson, of one of the Society's great friends and supporters in times past, died on 7th April 2009, at the age of 88. Over many years he was always glad to welcome us to see his work and the wildlife at Camperdown Wildlife Park and escort our members around Camperdown Park to show us the ways of the local birds and mammals. Born and bred in Dundee, his knowledge of local wild animals and particularly birds was profound and provided a great education for all. Some will remember him pointing out the only bird roost constructed as such and not as a nest, that of the treecreeper, in the soft bark of Wellingtonia trees. Alf also was great friends with one of our legendary former presidents, Len Fullerton, and with Joan Thomson, another significant president.

His compact and wiry frame, his beard and the gleaming, friendly eyes, told of a very active and varied life, ranging from art and sport, through a working life in forestry to his crowning achievement, setting up Camperdown Wildlife Park. Who could forget Jeremy, the sugar-puffs bear? A visit to his house in Monikie was a great pleasure - to hear his many tales and to see his breeding eagles, his pheasants, pigeons and poultry, not forgetting the roe deer fawn behind the sofa! It is thought, in fact, that he was the first man in Britain to breed golden eagles successfully in captivity. We and many others will miss him greatly.

Jim Cook

#### VINCENT AND JOYCE ELLMORE

Although they were not members of DNS, many Nats will have known Vincent and Joyce Ellmore, who were stalwarts of the SOC's Tayside branch through the 70s and 80s. They were behind the newsletters produced by the branch for many years.

Despite giving up birdwatching due to old age, they remained active until relatively recently, and died within weeks of each other, soon after moving into a care home in Crieff.

Colin McLeod

## SUMMER OUTING 2008

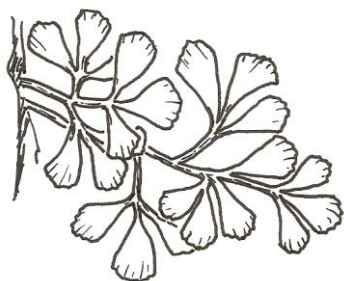
This report complements that of the lower level walk, which appears on page 14 of the 2008 Bulletin. My apologies for missing this item out last year. Ed.

### TULACH HILL

14th June 2008

It was quite a cool and showery day. After crossing the A9 we ascended a grassy path with a rich variety of plants underfoot. **Pignut** (*Conopodium majus*) and **dog's mercury** (*Mercurialis perennis*) predominated and, to the left, there was an abundance of meadow flowers. Past the gate, the mature **birchwood** was less exuberant but we stopped halfway to observe **swifts** flying above the valley. Crossing the wall, the grassy understorey gave way to emerging **bracken** (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and then **ling** (*Calluna vulgaris*) and coarse grasses.

We stopped for lunch amidst a brief shower and were entertained by several **whinchats** and a **kestrel** over the woods. We found a wide variety of flowering plants including **common butterwort** (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), **round-leaved sundew** (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and the **carnation sedge** (*Carex panicea*). We found that we had spread out all over the hillside by this stage.



Wall rue

At the limestone area, **heather** gave way to **grass** and many lime-loving plants were evident including **common rockrose** (*Helianthemum nummularium*), **mountain pansy** (*Viola lutea*) and **fairy flax** (*Linum catharticum*). In the grikes of the limestone pavement, near the summit, were **dog's mercury** and several **ferns**, including **green spleenwort** (*Asplenium viride*), **wall rue** (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), **male fern** (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) and **scaly male fern** (*Dropteris affinis*).

As we had taken so long to reach this area there was no time to examine the flushes on the upper slopes.

On the descent, however, a couple of **pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies** were found under unpromising conditions. I think all would agree that we had a very good day out.

Jack Moody

## WINTER MEETINGS 2009

### MONTREATHMONT FOREST

2nd January

I opened the bedroom curtains slowly - it was dry. No sun, but quite pleasant for a walk at Montreathmont Forest.

On arrival, quite a number of cars were already parked and "Happy New Year" was called. What a lovely welcome - there was Jenny Allan with a tray of mulled wine and cake. What a great start to a New Year's walk. The group of 26 happy Nats were ready for the walk after choosing their lunch from an excellent menu. After a few ticks on the list Margaret and Dorothy phoned the Letham Hotel. Now for the walk.

It was damp underfoot but a very happy group set off. Unfortunately the birds were having a long lie - only a **robin** was keen to keep up with us and a single **wren** was seen. Bob McCurley and his group saw more, including a **jay**, a **buzzard**, **fieldfares**, **coal tits**, **chaffinch** and **mistle thrush** and Pat Gaff added **crossbill**. Most of us saw **woodpigeons** in the fields and after a good walk we about turned to be back at the hotel for 12.30.

The food was good and the company excellent - the Letham Hotel did us proud - a good start to the New Year.

Margaret McLaren

## PLANT HUNTING WITH A CAMERA

Sid Clarke FRPS - 13th January

For our first meeting of 2009 we were treated to a marvellous insight to the work of a plant photographer. Sid Clarke, retired Principal Photographer at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, shared with us photographs he has taken over many years seeking out rare and colourful plant species from a number of European areas.

Our first port of call was the Iberian peninsular where Sid had tracked down a myriad of **narcissus** species that can be found throughout Spain and Portugal during March and April. We then headed a little further north to the Pyrenees. Here we were shown **anemone** and **androsace** species together with endemics *Adonis pyrenaica* and shy flowering *Ramonda myconi*.

On to the Alps where **primulas** and **crocus** were the order of the day. Rarities like *Primula allionii* from the Maritime Alps, others like *Primula recurbariensis*, *P. albenensis*, and *P. spectabilis* all from the Italian pre-alps, were beautifully captured on film. Mixed with the primulas were many more typical alpine including **gentians**, **leucojum**, **pulsatilla** and the odd **campanula**. Other special plants Sid had captured were a tiny *Narcissus provincialis* and the striking **lady's slipper orchid**, *Cypripedium calceolus*. However, there were so many more plants illustrated that I can't begin to list them all.

There was a change of scene again when we were transported south through Italy with more **narcissus** and **anemone** species on the way to the Gargano peninsula, a haven for **orchids**. *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *passionis* and *Dactylorhiza sambucina* were only two of many shown.

Next stops were the Mediterranean islands of Crete and Cyprus. On Crete we saw more orchids together with the endemic plants *Paeonia clusii*, *Arum creticum* and *Ebenus cretensis*. Then Cyprus where all three **tulip** species were described including the tale of the un-named tulip Sid and I had found on the Akamas peninsula. To date this has not yet been scientifically described. Also from Cyprus we saw *Orchis anatolica* ssp. *troodii*, *O. punctulata* and the endemic *Ophrys kotschyi*.

The last area covered was the Greek mainland. Here more **cyclamen** were noted along with rare **crocuses**, *Crocus flavus*, *C. veluchensis*, *C. cviji* and *C. sublimis*. The **orchids** here included *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *helena* and *Anacamptis papilionacea* ssp. *heroica*.

So the evening ended with, I think, us all a bit shell-shocked at seeing so many very, very good photographs one after the other. No iffy shots here. All were of the same high, professional standard. But that is Sid Clarke, photographer, but above all lover of the natural world that is all around us.

Brian Allan

## MEMBERS' NIGHT

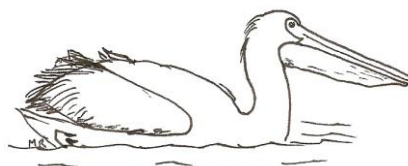
27th January

After all the usual announcements, Brian Ballinger handed over to Brian Allan for a veritable feast of members' photographs. No fewer than 13 people had contributed this year and all but one had submitted their images to Brian in advance, to be organised and shown in digital form. This forward planning resulted in a very smooth running evening. Those who showed photographs were:

Davie Stein Local Flora and Fauna. Fungi, including the **blue cheese polypore**, close-ups of **scarlet pimpernel** and **heartsease pansy**, a **kingfisher** at Guardbridge and an **emerald damselfly** showing the 'basket' of hairs used to catch flying prey.

Margaret McLaren Pelicans. Who needs to go to Melbourne to see **pelicans** when we had one at Broughty Ferry a few years ago?

Ruth Arnold Western Australian Flowers. A wonderful selection of colourful plants, including **kangaroo paw**, the national plant of Western Australia, several



**orchids**, the yellow flowers of *Banksia hookeriana* and scarlet ones of *B. coccinea* and **eucalyptus** flowers on a small tree.

Margaret Palin Durmitor Alps, Montenegro. The Black Lake and high mountain limestone scenery with a selection of plants seen there including *Primula halleri*, the yellow form of *Lilium carnolicum*, **bladder gentian**, a white **fragrant orchid** and *Fritillaria messanensis*.

Alban Houghton Nats Outings 2008. Everything from Jim Cook paddling in the South Esk (in wellies) to flowers and butterflies at Arbroath and Boddin with Corrie Fee plants and Rannoch **wood ants** for good measure.

Dorothy Fyffe Flowers of the Dolomites. Portraits of **lady's slipper orchid**, several other **orchids**, **bearded bellflower**, two kinds of **rampion** and **edelweiss**, among others, on a holiday which ended with a trip to Venice.

Brian Ballinger Scottish Flora and Insects. Mostly a year's work in Easter Ross with four new sites for **holly fern**, moth trapping in the snow and plant recording in the mountains for **dwarf willow** and **birch**. Ongoing work on vegetative keys for **wintergreens** and moth recording, including finding the caterpillar of **sweet gale moth**, a rarity. A **European rhinoceros beetle**, in Tuscany, was shown for added interest.

Liz Houghton New Zealand Adventure. Some excellent photos of Margaret Duncan in her Auckland Eco-Village home, looking very well. Native **tree ferns**, **kauri pine** and **orchids** and the **kea**, a kind of parrot. A visit to another former Nat, Carol Milton, who took them to see **kiwis**. There is little birdsong because the omnivorous **possums** raid nests.

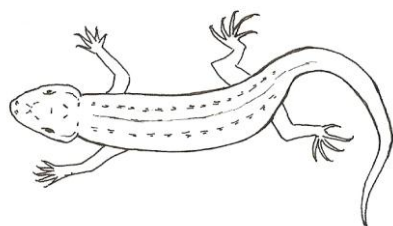
Jim Cook Nats People. Ancient history (the Nats and the photos, in some cases) bringing back memories of people and places. Photographers photographed, including Alban and Bede snapping **globe flower**, and Gordon Maxwell, horizontal, with his camera within inches of a rock pool.

Brian Allan Alpine Primulas. Excellent photographs of a range of **primulas** and, importantly, their habitats, with all the distinguishing features pointed out. Accompanying Sid Clarke on his photographic forays gives Brian a distinct advantage!

Anne Reid Barry Mill and Angus. Some common species at Barry Mill in close up, including the lowly **daisy** and **dandelion**. The Barry Burn in full spate, after the wettest barbecue ever, and a few of the **moths** trapped that night. **Clustered bellflower** at Carlingheugh and large numbers of **ladybird pupae** on the new fence posts along the coastal path nearby.

Bob McCurley Owls, Eagles and Gulls. **Tawny owl** at Lintrathen and **long-eared owl** in the Errol reed beds. A **short-eared owl** on Barry Buddon which was also shown as a short video. Digiscope photos of **golden eagles** in Glen Clova and a **honey buzzard** near Lunan Bay which was seen raiding a **wasps' nest**. The **ring-billed gull** which Bob spotted at Riverside while his car was being serviced finished this sequence. A short video of a **barn owl** at Powrie Brae in the dark brought the evening's show of digital images to a close.

Gordon Maxwell Various Localities. Slides of good places locally to visit for wildlife including the Eden Estuary for **waders**, **kingfisher** and **herons**, Lundie Crags for **ravens**, Corrie Fee for **red deer**, **flowers**, **lizards** and **newts** and Kinclaven Wood for **bluebells**. St Cyrus and Carlingheugh have good **rock pools** and the former has a wonderful range of **dune plants** and plentiful **lizards**.



Brian Allan thanked everyone for such a wide variety of excellent photographs and suggested that we would have to restrict people to fewer slides next

year if the evening continued to be so popular. Brian Ballinger then thanked Brian A. for all the effort he had put in to scanning, organising and presenting the evening's images.

Anne Reid

## MADAGASCAR

Richard Brinklow - 10th February

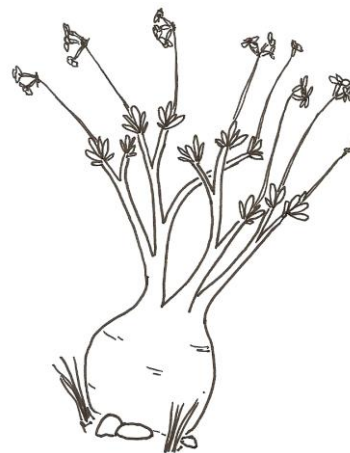
No doubt the country of Madagascar has always been very near the top of people's list for holiday destinations but, after Richard's fascinating and inspiring presentation, I'm sure that it has moved all the way up to the top.

We learned that Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world, lies off the east coast of Africa, is 1,000 miles in length and has mountains that reach 8,000 ft. Richard took us on a fascinating tour of the island taking in the four main vegetation types: dry deciduous woodlands, the highlands, spiny forest and the rainforest. Each habitat has its own specific flora and fauna and the whole island has more than its fair share of endemic species.

The dry deciduous woodlands are home to the **flatid leaf bug**, which is related to the **frog hopper** and, if you clap your hands, they twitch. We were lucky enough to see an image of the **Madagascar fish eagle**, which not only is endemic to Madagascar but also is very rare.

Within the highlands of Madagascar is Asolo National Park, which is home to the **elephant's foot plant** - a plant with swollen stems. Endemic bird species found in the highlands include **Madagascar wagtail**, **Benson's rock thrush**, **crested drongo** and **Madagascan hoopoe**.

The spiny forest, my personal favourite, was our next and probably the most unusual destination. Everything in the forest is.....you've guessed it - spiny. One of the bizarre and elaborate plant forms in the spiny forest is the **octopus tree**, the seeds of which you can actually buy on eBay! We also learned that local people make clearings in the forest to grow crops and graze cattle. We saw yet another Madagascan endemic bird, a **Sakalava weaver**, one of only two species of weaver in Madagascar, and then an extremely rare bird called a **subdesert mesite**, also an endemic with a characteristic white eye stripe and a sickle-shaped bill.



To say that Richard gave us an extremely interesting presentation of the flora and fauna of Madagascar would be a gross understatement. In my opinion Richard's images gave us much more than that, not only did we learn many fascinating facts about the country we also discerned a passion for the wildlife and a respect for the local people and culture. An excellent evening was had by all.

Kim Eberst

## SOCIAL EVENING

20th February

The Social Evening at the Queen's Hotel turned out to be quite an event full of fun, quizzes, activity and great company. The proceedings began with a picture quiz that saw us divided between three tables, each table trying to jealously guard answers as names were put to the photographs of well known and acclaimed naturalists both past and present. However, such was the level of hubbub that each table had all the correct answers, having been able to pick up on an enthusiastically voiced name when it came to the mind of a member of an opposing team.

There was a cleverly compiled crossword which caused some of us to puzzle over the answers for longer than we had at first thought. No such thing as a doddle!!!

One of the highlights was a cross between Who Wants to be a Millionaire and The Weakest Link. The four competitors, Anne Reid, Peter Ellis, Jim Cook and Gordon Maxwell had to answer questions on a multiplicity of subjects and all this accompanied by special and appropriate musical effects. All contestants did very well, but, despite some attempts at tactical voting, Anne Reid triumphed over her male opponents and picked up the trophy, which had been acquired especially for the occasion and which will no doubt become a much coveted and sought-after award in future years.

In Darwin style, the final project was to "sculpt" and name, a creature that had evolved over a period of time. This was achieved by using Play Doh. Needless to say, we all fell to this task with great glee as most of us hadn't had our hands on Play Doh for quite some time. Also, needless to say, the naming of the resulting creatures was weird and wonderful as was the extremely fanciful description of each by a 'volunteered' team member.

To top all that, copious amounts of stovies with oatcakes were served together with a huge tray of individual trifles. The fare was sufficiently plentiful that some, if not all, of us had seconds, or even thirds - you know who you are!

Numerous prizes, including some splendid chocolate ladybirds, had been donated for the raffle and all in all the evening was a great success. Thanks must go to Kim, Lorna and David for all the organisation.

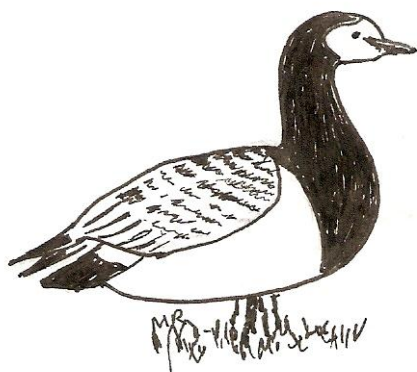
Marjorie Gillan

## PEAT, GEESE AND MALT WHISKY

Martyn Jamieson - 24th February 2009

Martyn described how, in his early days of bird-watching, his love affair with the islands off the west coast, particularly Islay and Mull, began. He and various friends would travel north from their home on Merseyside to explore and sample the delights of the islands on a shoestring budget. Their mode of transport was some clapped-out old van which doubled as living accommodation. Meals were, of necessity, rather frugal affairs such as beans on toast - although this was often accompanied by generous measures of the local beverage.

As Martyn progressed to make natural history his full-time occupation, taking up a position with the Field Studies Council, the knowledge he had acquired stood him in good stead as he went on to lead groups of naturalists on visits to the islands.



While Martyn's principal interest is ornithological - borne out by his excellent slides and descriptions of such as **choughs**, **barnacle geese** and **golden eagles** - he talked with authority on the plant, mammal and insect life of the islands. All liberally peppered with amusing anecdotes of the history and mythology of the area.

His talk brought back happy memories of my own visits to these islands and kindled a desire to re-visit in the not too distant future.

Alex Rollo

## SUMMER OUTINGS 2009

### EDINBURGH

25th April

The first summer outing this year was by coach to Edinburgh. In the morning we visited the premises of the Scottish Mineral and Lapidary Club in Leith. We were warmly welcomed by Richard Gillanders and other members of the club, who provided us with morning refreshments. Richard then gave us a brief history of the club. During the 19th Century Edinburgh was a thriving centre of the lapidary and jewellery trades, turning out high quality 'pebble jewellery' from a ready supply of 'Scotch pebbles' or agates and Cairngorm stones. In the 20th century this trade declined and by the 1950s only one was left. However the last of these professional lapidarists, Alexander Begbie, passed on the know-how of the craft to Ron Bennet, who, shortly afterwards, founded the club in 1958. The club is the oldest in the UK and has about 100 members from all over Scotland.

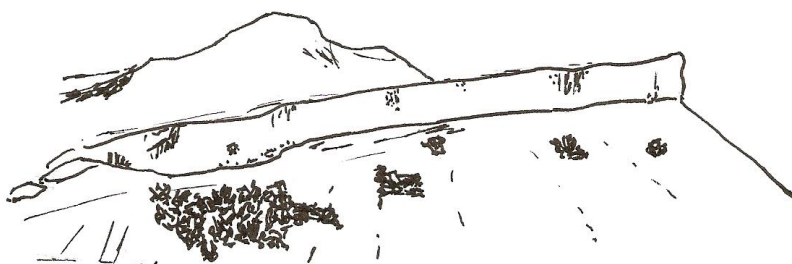
We were then shown around the club premises which are accessible for all. The major part of the building is dedicated to the preparation of minerals and gemstones - from the original cutting and trimming of sections from the base rock, to shaping, then grinding and polishing. Finally, many members go on to make jewellery.

Of interest to the Dundee Naturalists were many Scottish semi-precious stones, including a selection of **agates** from Angus. There are several famous **agate**-containing localities in Angus, from natural outcrops along the coast such as the famous "blue hole" to more temporary exposures in quarries. The club also has a collection of minerals and gemstones that form a valuable source of information.

From Leith we travelled to Holyrood Park, past the new Scottish Parliament building. The weather was fine and sunny and we met with Nicky Pettigrew and Jan Tapson, Holyrood Park Rangers, who gave us an interesting, informative and enjoyable guided tour of the park. The park was once a Royal Estate and it is this that prevented it from being built on. The park is not only a scheduled monument but an SSSI and it contains a number of rare plants and also four Iron Age forts. Our walk started at the education centre and then crossed to the Queen's Well and followed Volunteers Walk past Hunters Bog. The bog has been kept wet by an earthen dam, unfortunately a breach a month before we arrived had drained the bog at a critical moment of the Spring. This area is famous for its **adders tongue fern**, the only population in Edinburgh and one of the largest and most northerly colonies in Scotland. From here there is a good view of St Margaret's Loch. Until a few years ago there was only standing water in the park, but the previous director has made an artificial stream from Hunters Bog to the Loch. St Margaret's Loch is a more formal pond, but the park contains two other lochs, Dunsapie and Duddingston.

We were able to have a good view of the Long Row outcrops and Arthur's Seat, part of a volcano that once had five cones including the castle mound. The rangers explained the characteristics of a volcano, it must have a vent, a magma chamber, an ash cone and lava flows. Arthur's Seat was formed during the Devonian period at about the same time as Dundee Law. Arthur's Seat is supposed to have the shape of a crouching lion when seen from this direction.

As our walk continued we came across evidence of how people have used the park by passing through the Camstone quarries. At the entrance is evidence of another period of earth history, the Ice Age. For here is a glacial



erratic, a large volcanic boulder left amongst the sandstones of the quarry. This boulder was carried to this point by a glacier and left behind after it melted.

The quarry also contains a more modern secret. A geocache. Geocaching is a modern day worldwide treasure hunt. A cache is usually a container holding a number of small items. Once one has been hidden its approximate location is posted on the internet. Using a handheld global position system device you have to find the container. Once found it is now traditional to take an item from the cache and replace it with a new item. Then you take your item to the next cache and replace it. This way some objects have gone around the world.

The path from the quarry passes one of the Iron Age hill forts and there is even evidence of run rig farming.

At the end of Volunteers Walk we stopped and some members of the group followed the road to look for another rare plant the **sticky catchfly** *Lychnis viscaria* which was first discovered in the park.

We then headed for the path at the base of Salisbury Crags and past Hutton's Section. It was here that James Hutton noticed that the **sandstone** had been split by a harder volcanic rock. This observation led him to believe that the sandstone was already there before the **volcanic lava**. This observation led to the decline of the theory of neptunism, whereby all rocks were founded by deposition in water. Hutton's theory, called plutonism, also suggested that the landscape was formed by processes similar to those that operate today, i.e. gradual erosion. Hutton came to the conclusion that the earth was considerably older than was thought at the time.

Our walk continued under the magnificent Salisbury crags, with nesting **fulmars** and other birds including **kestrels**. Finally we negotiated the steep “radical road” built by unemployed weavers after the Napoleonic wars

Our thanks to Historic Scotland rangers Nicky Pettigrew and Jan Tapson.

David Lampard

## BACKMUIR WOOD

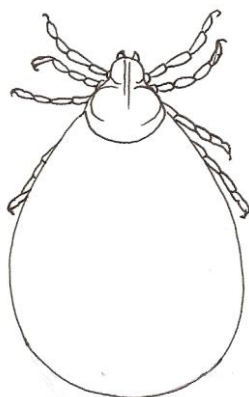
12th May

This was a return visit to the local Community Woodland owned by the Woodland Trust. 25 members arrived on a cool but sunny evening and we just managed to fit all the cars into the car park with a bit of double parking. David Lampard provided a list of species previously recorded from the museum records.

Grant Kidd and a colleague from the local group kindly came round with us and described the management of the wood. The Woodland Trust (with a little help from the DNS among many others) has just been successful in raising money for the purchase of an associated piece of land. Backmuir remains a popular place for recreational walking.

The plants were bursting into leaf and flower with species such as **wood sorrel** (*Oxalis acetosella*), **dog violet** (*Viola riviniana*) and **garlic mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) being seen. In the wet areas there was a splendid display of **marsh marigold** (*Caltha palustris*) and a strong smell of **water mint** (*Mentha aquatica*).

Birdsong rang out, particularly from **willow warblers**, **blackcaps** and **chiffchaff**, and



Anne Reid spotted a **jay**. No wild mammals were seen but there were signs of **moles**, **roe deer** and **red squirrels**. There have been recent problems with illegal killing of deer and efforts are being made to preserve the red squirrel population.

Richard Brinklow and Anne searched for invertebrates but they were relatively sparse in the cool weather, although some interesting beetles were seen including a **cream spot ladybird**. A single queen **buff-tailed bumblebee** was found, though Kim said there had been more seen the previous evening. David Lampard demonstrated the hazards of going off the path into the longer vegetation by catching five or six **ticks** with a single sweep of his net. Those present were reminded of the hazards of **Lyme disease** which the ticks may transmit to unwary Nats.

The local group and the Woodland Trust are to be congratulated on the progress that is being made in the wood.

Brian Ballinger and Kim Eberst

## MYSTERY TOUR

16th May

Well, where would we go this time? A party of 30 naturalists set out at 9.00am in hopeful anticipation of an interesting and even an entertaining day. Heading west along the road to Perth, the coach pulled off at Longforan and made its way down onto the flat lands of the Carse of Gowrie. A fine display of **cowslips** on a roundabout attracted our eyes as we turned to go past Castle Huntly.

We stopped to observe the flat flood-plain of the Carse and hear about the drainage of the area in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the technical innovation of the tile pipe, the **arctic clay** deposits of the Carse, the brickworks, the red bricks of old buildings in Dundee, clay biggings and **apple** and **pear orchards**. In fact, we passed several of the old orchards as we progressed along the flat almost straight roads but couldn't stop.

The coach pulled into the Cairn O' Mhor winery and we were honoured to be treated to a tour of the facility by the owner himself. He detailed the process of turning the fruits and flowers harvested from their own orchards, and in the surrounding area, into a drinkable product. We followed him out into the orchard to see the close-packed lines of **elder** bushes and hear about the criteria used to select the bushes. This must be the only place in the world which selects and breeds elder bushes for their flowering and fruiting characteristics. Afterwards the party was treated to samples of the elixirs and encouraged (not that much was needed!) to visit the shop and purchase the products.

The coach made its way back onto the dual carriageway past Perth, turned off at the Kinross services fly-over and drove down to the car-park at the Castle ferry terminal and fishing centre on the shore of Loch Leven. Time for lunch and most welcome it was too. Although the clouds threatened rain, most members took a post-prandial stroll along the new board-walk along part of the shoreline. Back in the coach, the question again was "Where were we headed next?"

Back across the motorway, the coach made its way over a series of small roads over the edge of the Ochills and headed towards Alloa. Meanwhile, the clouds lowered and rain started to fall. Some way short of the town the coach stopped and most of us got out to walk down through a small forest to Gartmorn Dam. Fortunately, we were all well prepared and could ignore the pouring rain. A selection of woodland plants, **wood anemones**, **wood sorrel**, **opposite-leaved golden saxifrage** and others caught our attention. Further on, past a field of free-range **pigs** and wandering **guinea fowl**, we passed a small pond and some of us were able to count a total of 11 **herons** in the vicinity. On reaching the reservoir, a few turned left to the bird hide and sanctuary, but most kept on to reach the dam and the Visitor Centre. Luckily, the rain started to ease off and we were able to enjoy the scenery and the wildlife, especially the abundant **swans** and **ducks**, and hear a fascinating tale about the building of the dam. It was the first large-scale dam and reservoir constructed in Scotland, completed in 1714. It was not a reservoir for drinking water, at least not then, but was built to supply water for power to drive waterwheels which operated pumps to dry out several near-by coal mines. Ironically, the chief instigator of the project was the 6th Earl of Mar, known to history by his nick-name of 'Bobbing John'. Those of us who know our history realised that he was the man who raised the clans in the 1715 Jacobite uprising (The Nats visited the Earl of Mar's Punchbowl up beyond Braemar in 2008) but was a total failure as a military commander, particularly at the battle of Sherrifmuir. In fact, he had to disappear in a hurry to France in the aftermath of the rebellion and would never have had time to benefit from his labours on the dam. We had time, though, to walk around and explore the area. Dorothy Fyfe won the competition to find and record as many new species as possible, not on the list provided.

After about an hour and a half, the party made its way along to the coach (some of us helping to look for a lost dog on the way) and went on to visit the Alloa tower. This historic building was the chief home of John Erskine, the Earl of Mar, and sits in an interesting little parkland. Although none of us had time to explore the tower, we heard a short talk about its history and several members vowed that they'd be back to see more.

Our last visit, although rather brief, was to the site of Alloa harbour on the Forth. Unfortunately, the tide was in, the mud flats were all covered and not many birds were visible. A few **cormorants** could be seen diving in the river and floating **gulls** dotted the surface. We heard about the harbour and the customs house constructed under the patronage of the Earl of Mar and about the small

railway, using wooden rails and horse-drawn wagons, which brought coal down to the harbour. This was one of the first constructed in this country, long before the development of steam power. On the way back to Dundee, we reflected on the range of country we'd seen, the wildlife, the history and the interesting places we'd visited. It had indeed been a most varied day.



Jim Cook

## INVERURIE WEEKEND

29th - 31st May

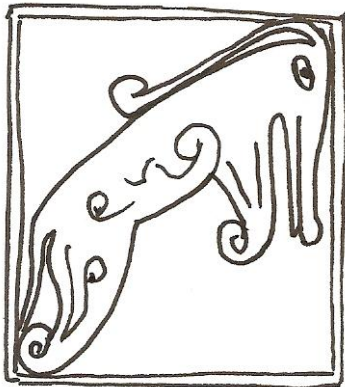
The pick-up and departure went smoothly and we left Dundee in bright sunshine just after 5pm. The menu for dinner was passed round the bus so that we could phone our order ahead and everyone settled down for the journey north. At Brechin we stopped briefly for Ian, the driver, to investigate a mysterious noise, but nothing seemed to be amiss and we were soon on our way again. Unfortunately, something was indeed amiss and, with warning bleeps sounding, we drew to a halt in a bus stop just south of Aberdeen. Ian set to and investigated and got his hands really dirty before he realised that he should have taken off his tie and rolled up his shirt sleeves. Margaret and Lorna, rising to the occasion, took an arm each and sorted the sleeves. The result of his investigation showed that the air line was broken and no air meant no brakes. We had to wait for a mechanic from Aberdeen or a replacement bus, whichever got us going sooner. As he waited for the mechanic, Ian lifted the floor hatch in the bus aisle. All adjacent Nats peered through at the road beneath and those who could not contain their curiosity also came from the back of the bus. Someone asked "Was this in the Risk Assessment?" Meanwhile Margaret phoned the Hotel with our dinner order and told them we would be rather later than planned.

In the end a replacement Riddlers bus arrived while the mechanic was away to get the required spare part. We were fortunate that it had just dropped off a party at Stonehaven and everyone transferred themselves and their luggage and settled down again. Finally, we were on our way again. Not for long, though. Ian announced "He's brought us a bus but he's no' put any diesel in it!" so we had to make a short diversion to rectify this.

On arrival at the Kintore Arms Hotel in Inverurie we went straight to the dining room and enjoyed an excellent, if late, dinner. Bags were then removed from the bus and rooms allocated. Some people fell straight into bed but Jim, Davie and Anne went for a short walk down to the River Don in the fading light and were rewarded with good views of **bats** flitting over the water. Most seemed to be **pipistrelles** but we reckoned that **Daubenton's** were also present.

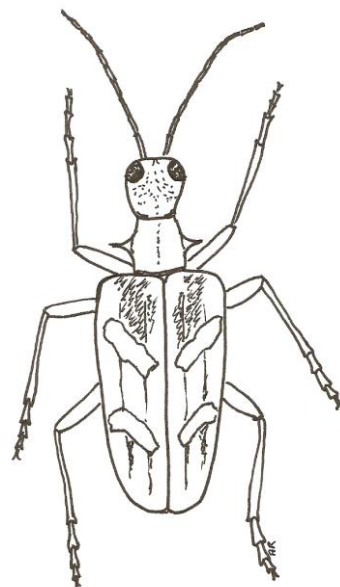
Saturday morning dawned clear and sunny. A number of people had a walk by the river before breakfast, some going further than others. The main point of note was the almost tropical temperature - no coats needed even at 7.30am! All the birds were singing lustily, most notably **sedge warblers**, and the **bumblebees** converged on the numerous **comfrey** plants on the riverbanks.

Our first destination of the day was the Archaeolink prehistory park at Oyne, a mere 10 miles from our Inverurie base. Though our booked guided tour was scheduled for 10.30am the staff were flexible enough to start us out early. Mark, our excellent guide, put a natural history slant on his commentary and guided us from the stone age, via bronze and iron ages to the era when the Romans visited the area. At every stage we were shown reconstructions of dwellings or shelters and discussed the local materials used in their construction, the lifestyle of our ancient ancestors and the vegetation and wildlife which supported their lives. After the tour we had time to explore the site again, see the informative film and have our lunch. A very few people (possibly just Anne) climbed the steep path to the top of the hill fort on the south side of the site which, as might be expected, had commanding views over the surrounding countryside and a clear sightline to Tap O'Noth, another, larger hill fort about 10 miles away.



It had originally been planned to visit the nearby Maiden Stone, intricately carved with Pictish designs, later in the afternoon. However, as our intrepid bus driver, Ian, decided that he could actually get the bus under a railway bridge with sharp corner, which is considered by some as tight in a car, we visited it next. The sun was just right for optimum views of the east side of the stone and many photographs were taken as we marvelled at the skill involved in creating such an object. The sun continued to shine brightly on us and the **broom** on the opposite side of the road was in full bloom creating a colourful backdrop for the stone and a wonderful smell of coconut.

The next port of call was the Visitor Centre at Bennachie Forest. Here there were several marked paths, to suit all abilities, and we each attempted one of our own choice. A small party, including Ian, set out for the Mither Tap summit of Bennachie. Despite the hot sun we were kept cool by a stiff breeze which increased in strength as we approached the summit. The result of this was that the only bird seen was a windswept **meadow pipit**. Some care was needed to negotiate the last few metres and several resorted to hands and knees for increased safety. Photographic proof of reaching the summit was made, though the resultant photos give no indication of the fierce wind! Barbara Tulloch was thrilled to have reached the top and Brian Ballinger said he was nearly blown away! As we began our descent a very handsome **longhorn beetle** with four cream markings on its wing cases landed on the path ahead of us. This was later identified as *Rhagium bifasciatum*. On our return to the Visitor Centre we found that close views had been had of **great spotted woodpeckers**, and a number of other birds, on the feeders there - easy birdwatching. Anne found a **cuckoo bumblebee** on a dandelion flower beside the picnic tables just outside the door. As we drove away Alastair Fraser spotted a **red kite** soaring over the edge of the forest - quite the most exciting bird of the day.



After dinner Margaret had planned a short walk by the river, but, on the basis of early morning explorations, Anne suggested a longer version for those who wished to follow her. The temperature was still high enough to make us marvel that we had been so lucky as we meandered along the river bank. The nests in the **heron** colony were full of unseen young, but we could hear the characteristic beak clicking noises from the tall trees on the opposite bank. A family of **swans** with five small **cygnets** was seen beyond the railway bridge and **bees** still buzzed in the numerous **comfrey** flowers alongside the path. **Reed bunting** and **sedge warbler** were seen and heard and **swallows** swooped low over the river. There was even a single **common tern**, presumably a non-breeder, fishing in the river. At the far end of our walk we came to the graveyard and climbed up the considerable height of the **motte** at its edge. This fine example still has the **bailey** mound nearby, presumably originally connected by a wooden bridge. Collectively known as The Bass, the motte and bailey were originally constructed in the 11th or 12th century by the Earls of Garioch.

The tropical weather persisted on Sunday and we set off in a generally homeward direction. The first stop was at Tyrebagger Wood, just north of Aberdeen, where there was a selection of waymarked paths suitable for all. Walking in the shade of the forest was very pleasant on such a warm day, but a small party undertook the longer walk around, and up, Elrick Hill adjacent to the forest. A day-flying moth was seen and Brian Ballinger knew what it was but could not remember its name. Shortly afterwards he was spotted using his mobile phone to ask Barbara for the identification - **brown silver-lines moth** was the answer. In the absence of the moth book we still managed! Just before we re-entered the conifer forest we heard a distant **cuckoo**.



After lunch we took the scenic, cross country route past the Loch of Skene and Dunecht to Banchory where we were given free time. Some opted for the teasops but a small group walked to the nearby Falls of Feuch to see if the **salmon** were leaping. Indeed they were, and some people even managed to get reasonable photographs to prove it. There was also a pleasant shady walk along the path between the river and the golf course, but time did not allow for a full exploration of this. A quickly snatched ice cream was much enjoyed on such a hot afternoon before we boarded the bus for our return to Dundee.

Margaret McLaren and Lorna Ward were heartily thanked for their organisation of this very enjoyable weekend, and especially for laying on such wonderful weather. Dorothy Fyffe was also thanked for her help on the recce and for her financial efficiency.

Anne Reid

## BIRKS OF ABERFELDY

13th June

This was our second return visit to this beautiful area. On the way we admired the beautiful **northern marsh orchids** (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) along the A9 north of Perth, now apparently better protected against inappropriate mowing. 36 of us arrived at the car park in Aberfeldy in drizzle but the day soon became bright and sunny. The present leader was so keen to start that he nearly fell down the bus steps - a hazard which had not been included in the risk assessment!

We walked through the arch into the lower part of the Birks, usually missed by car drivers, and were greeted by a mass of wild flowers and the strong smell of **ramsons** or **wild garlic** (*Allium ursinum*). The tree collection was at the beginning of the upper section and we regretted that many exotic trees were not labelled whereas some more familiar ones were.

The path up the left side of the Moness Burn climbs less steeply than the right, and we soon saw our first example of **goldilocks buttercup** (*Ranunculus auricomus*). Bird song was prominent and a **wood warbler** sounded, as well as numerous **chaffinches**. A **dipper** was spotted by Gordon Maxwell. David Lampard was watched anxiously by some of the group as he seemed to enter the burn before returning with specimens of **caddis**, **mayfly** and **shrimp**.

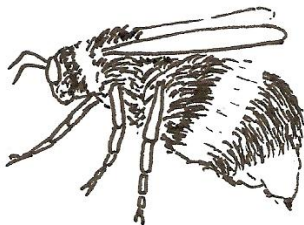
Jim Cook pointed out a splendid fresh **dryad's saddle** fungus. Pat Gaff was examining **horsetails** (*Equisetum* spp.), some of which may be hybrids, and noted the **wood stitchwort** (*Stellaria nemorum*).

The usually elusive **birds nest orchid** (*Neottia nidus-avis*) was having a good year, being discovered in three separate places. One specimen was right by the path and was much photographed.

When we arrived at the steps some ventured on and up (see below) and a smaller party returned downhill, joining the statue of Robert Burns on a seat for lunch. This group then walked across Aberfeldy to Wade's Bridge on the River Tay and explored the path that follows the river upstream. Here we admired a group of **grey wagtails** catching insects and viewed the **globe flowers** (*Trollius europaeus*) and **marsh marigolds** (*Caltha palustris*) on the river bank. We turned back when we came to a meadow which a dog walker had said contained bulls and later enjoyed an ice-cream by the putting green, where a vigorous contest was in progress.

Brian Ballinger

Those of the party who felt able to tackle the series of steep steps to the top of the Birks continued upwards, and, though some may have regretted their choice, at least the spectacular views of the waterfalls gave everyone an excuse to stop for a breather. All made it to the top where lunch was taken on a small open piece of ground near the path. Two **bullfinches** were seen, apparently eating **elm** seeds, while we sat munching, but we didn't linger too long afterwards because the **midges** started munching us. The top section is notable for having both species of **cow wheat** and we all saw and compared them. The **common cow wheat** (*Melampyrum pratense*) is slightly later-flowering and was not so easy to find as the shorter, more intensely yellow flowers of the much rarer **small cow wheat** (*Melampyrum sylvaticum*) which lined the path in places.



At the path junction, a few elected to take the direct route down the other side of the burn, while the rest took the longer loop to the west. We paused at the junction of the Urlar Road to look at **bumblebees** and David Lampard spotted a **fritillary butterfly** in the long grass nearby. With commendable stealth he managed to catch it in his net and we were able to admire it and confirm that it was a **small pearl-bordered**, before releasing it unharmed. As the path descended gently across the hillside several people heard a **cuckoo** calling and all enjoyed the views across the Tay valley.

**Viviparous bistort** (*Persicaria bistorta*) was spotted beside the path and, slightly unexpectedly, there were **tufted ducks** on a small pond nearby.

As we made our way back towards Aberfeldy on the minor road we kept stopping to look at the rich verges. The **vetches** seemed very attractive to large numbers of **early** and

**common carder bumblebees** (*Bombus pratorum* and *B. pascuorum*) and some **white-tailed bumblebees** (*B. lucorum*) were also seen. The highlight, however, was when Pat Gaff told us he had seen a **mountain bumblebee** (*B. monticola*) on **birds foot trefoil** "back a bit". He said it wasn't far, so Anne and David went back to look as there has been a special recording effort for this species this year. Pat's "back a bit" seemed like quite a long way, but a bee was still there as described, and was duly confirmed and recorded. A **painted lady butterfly** was seen sunning itself on the road and several **green-veined whites** flitted past on the last part of the road.

On our return to Aberfeldy there was just time for an ice cream before returning to the bus for the homeward journey. A most enjoyable day.

Anne Reid

## SCOTIA SEEDS

16th June

On this Tuesday evening outing 17 members met at Mavisbank near Brechin, home of a hidden gem, Scotia seeds.

Scotia seeds are a specialist wildflower nursery that produces seed for many conservation projects in Scotland. They developed out of a need to produce wildflower seed from local Scottish stock. This is to maintain a range of genetic diversity in wildflowers and also to protect the local varieties that have developed over the centuries. Local varieties are more suitable to the environmental conditions in which they will be used. Many wildflower seed suppliers use an indiscriminate mix of seed from all over Europe, so growing locally prevents the introduction of foreign genes and also keeps costs down.

Scotia seeds' founder, Giles Laverack, and his partner Fiona, run the business and with a background in commercial horticulture, they bring a scientific background to the whole business. In fact they have one full time member of staff who carries out research and testing.

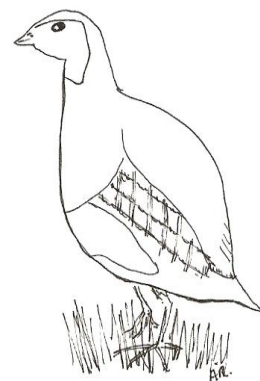
We were shown around the farm and the processing area by Giles. When Scotia took over the farm it was a typical industrial scale operation with one large field. Over the past years Giles has broken this up by planting miles of hedges and added other environmental projects to attract wildlife such as a pond and woodland.

The fields are divided into plots where there is a mix of individual species of plants grown in rows just like any other crop and different types of meadow, grown from their own seed mixtures. When we visited the farm many plants were in full flower, and attracting numerous insects such as **bees** and **damselflies**. The farm is also bumblebee-friendly, partly by chance. Small stacks of hay bales from the previous year had been colonised by **white-tailed** and **garden bumblebees** which had at least three nests in the bales.

The success of Scotia is down to two factors which Giles thinks are unique in wildflower production. All the seed has a pedigree, i.e. the source of the original wild plants is known. Giles also operates a quality control system adapted from commercial horticulture. He can guarantee that in a given packet of seed 100% of the seed is of the correct plant; in some of his rivals up to 70% of the seed may not even be the right plant. Giles can also guarantee that the seed will grow! Scotia supplies a range of customers from large conservation projects to gardeners.

Once we had seen the processing facilities including the smallest combine harvesters we had ever seen, we walked round the fields and were able to examine the plants and see the wildlife ponds. The previous evening Anne Reid and I had set up a moth trap and members were able to examine the catch. The showiest specimen was a poplar hawk moth but a total of 12 species had been trapped. All were released at the end of our visit.

Just as dusk was falling a few members had a last look around and almost tripped over a **hedgehog**. The final mystery was a bird calling from within the grass meadows, we never did see it but it may have been a **partridge**



David Lampard

## GLEN ESK

27th June

On a cloudy but warm Saturday, 26 members made the journey by car to Glen Esk. Near the car park Trevor Rose, of the Herpetological Society, had laid down some corrugated iron shelters for reptiles. We looked under them but there was nothing visible so we set out.

We walked from the car park along Loch Lee making observations of the wildlife as we went. The estate road along the loch provided plenty of interest for the botanically minded with **sundew**, **butterwort** and **lesser spearwort** in the wetter places, some clumps of **rockrose** and the **ling** and **bell heather** just coming into flower. Further up were plentiful **heath spotted orchids** and one or two spikes of **fragrant orchid**.

Along the path were a number of insects including **northern brown argus**, **small heath** and **red admiral butterflies**, a **chimney sweeper moth** and **common blue damselfly**. At Inchgrundle we had lunch and divided into two groups. One went to Carlochry Loch above Inchgrundle and the second went to the Falls of Unich.

Almost as soon as we set off along the track past Inchgrundle cottage we saw two **adders** which were basking along the edge of the path. Leaving these behind we continued up the Shank of Inchgrundle and around to Carlochry. It was immediately apparent that there was a lot of vermin control going on.

Members of the group spotted **common lizards**, **large red damselflies**, a **ground beetle** which was possibly *Carabus glabratus*, and **dor beetles**, **small heath butterfly** and **frogs** and **toads**. At the Loch we saw the rosette leaves of **water lobelia** and a **birch sawfly**. Circling **buzzards** completed the day.

The group that reached the Falls of Unich were rewarded with **golden-ringed dragonfly**, **painted lady** and **small tortoiseshell**.

We made our way back to the cars and had time to see the adders again. A final look under the reptile tins produced a **slowworm**. All in all a successful outing.

David Lampard

## GLEN PROSEN

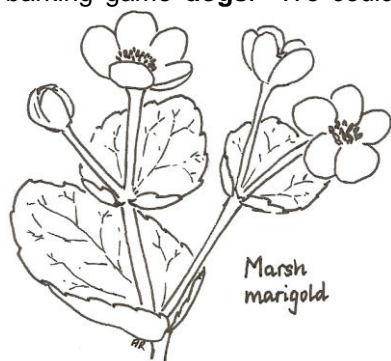
11th July

We were hopeful of a good sunny day for the walk up to the White Glen and the omens were excellent. A good turn-out of members (over 30) made it up to the top of the Glen Prosen road, which made car parking rather difficult, and we had to wait a while for some to park their cars further down and walk back up. A pair of **greenfinches**, a **spotted flycatcher**, a strident **great tit** and a flitting **pied wagtail** attracted our attention meanwhile.

The party soon began to move along the track towards the farm and its kennel of barking game **dogs**. We could hear a few **larks** trilling over the moor, a distant **cuckoo** called further down the glen and a few of us stopped at the bridge to look at the plants flourishing in the small burn. A brace of **marsh marigolds** attracted attention and **water forget-me-nots**, **cuckoo flowers**, **opposite-leaved golden saxifrage** and a few plants of **water-cress** decorated the banks. Further up were scattered leaves of **wood anemone** and the drier ground was dotted in places with the white heads of **pignut**.

Further along, a small group stopped to watch a **kestrel** hawking and hovering along the plantation edge some 400 metres further up the hill. Although it swooped several times it didn't seem to catch anything. Much nearer several **rabbits** grazed unconcerned. The group passed the white house half way along and a few members decided to break for lunch and then turn back.

At intervals, we could hear the trilling of **sandpipers** along the river below us. A soaring **buzzard** mewed over a distant woodland. Along the track members found an array of interesting species including **common** and **marsh louseworts**, abundant **lesser spearwort** and both common insectivorous plants, **butterwort** and **round-leaved sundew**. In places



the trackside rivulet and pools harboured masses of **tadpoles**. Several members wandered further afield, looking for **marsh** and **heath-spotted orchids**, and finding a few and also **cotton grasses**, **ragged robin**, a range of **sedges** and **rushes** and a few adult **frogs** but no **newts** or **adders**.

Most of the party lunched by the major bridge and enjoyed the bursts of sunshine. As well as **meadow brown butterflies**, one or two **moths** and some large **flies** - and **midgies** - the sun brought out a few **blue damselflies**. How different the scene looked! The area ahead had been a tight mass of plantation conifers only a few years before. Now it was an open, tangled mass of small branches, roots and stumps. A little further on someone noticed a cluster of **water skaters** gathered in a tight cluster at the edge of a small pond. They must be feeding on something, but what? Careful use of binoculars revealed the answer - a **common red damselfly**, unfortunate for the insect but an interesting record.

The narrow single-girder bridge over the White Water deterred a few members but most made it across to the bottom of the Kilbo path before finally turning back. However, a small party, encouraged by Vic and Joy Cammack, headed further up the Glen towards the distant rock-faces. One or two members had visited the area before, to look for alpenes, but not for a while. Davie and Gordon helped to look for **lesser twayblade orchids** and eventually, after parting many heather clumps, we found a few. The group made it about halfway there but had to turn back through lack of time. Meanwhile, Vic had powered on ahead to reach the cliff face and eventually caught us up on the way back. It had been a long but interesting outing, with lots of wildlife.

Jim Cook

## ST CYRUS NNR

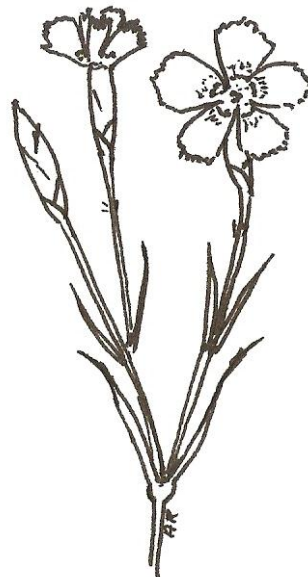
25th July

Although the week on the run up to our outing had been dire, the Saturday promised to be dry with some sun. This forecast was to prove accurate and over 30 Nats headed eagerly to the National Nature Reserve at St. Cyrus.

The dunelands were a colourful fragrant delight with **marjoram**, **rest harrow**, **harebells**, **storksills**, **wild thyme** and many other flowering plants. The first speciality we met was the **clustered bellflower**, *Campanula glomerata*. Soon afterwards we spotted more gems including **maiden pink**, *Dianthus deltoides*, and **bloody cranesbill**, *Geranium sanguineum*. **Butterflies** and **bumblebees** were busy amongst the flowers. We were delighted to observe **common blue** and **small copper butterflies**. The **ragwort** leaves were covered with striped **cinnabar moth caterpillars**. Beside the path we found some magnificent specimens of **parasol mushrooms**. They are supposed to make good eating but it seemed a shame to pick them!

There was no shortage of gems for the birdwatchers in the party as we had stunning views of four **peregrines**, two adults with their two offspring. They performed for us by mobbing a passing **buzzard** but the peregrines themselves were mobbed in turn by **fulmars** that were still nesting on the cliffs.

Some of the party headed up the path at the north end of the reserve to try to find the **wild liquorice**, *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, which was known from there in the past. However we were to draw a blank this time. We did observe, with binoculars, a single clump of **Nottingham catchfly**, *Silene nutans*, growing on the cliff. The climb was not wasted since on the way down we spotted quite a number of **common lizards**, both adults and some small dark youngsters no more than two inches long. They seemed happy to 'pose' for the keen photographers in the party.



By lunchtime the sun had come out and we all enjoyed a leisurely stroll back to the coach where, as we waited to board, Liz Houghton showed us an old shell from a **masked crab**. It was fascinating to see the features of a 'face' on the back of the shell.

Brian and Jenny Allan

## BARRY BUDDON OPEN NATURE DAY

9th August

A record turnout of 79 members from the five local Conservation Groups (SWT, SOC, RSPB, Angus and Dundee Bird Club and Dundee Nats) gathered on Barry Buddon Training Area for the annual Open Nature Day. Captain Tom Graham, Commandant of Barry Buddon, welcomed and addressed the enthusiasts and wished them a good day.



During the course of the day, the birdwatchers spotted a total of 67 species, the highlights being **green woodpecker**, **redpoll**, **bullfinch**, **goldcrest** and **long-tailed tit**. Passage migration birds included **green sandpiper**, **greenshank**, **wheatear**, **cuckoo**, and, a big surprise, a **great skua** which flew past the lighthouse and continued inland.

Butterflies stole the day, with a record count of 15 different species, which included the rare and totally unexpected sighting of a **purple hairstreak**, a first for both Barry Buddon and the county of Angus! This species is normally associated with **oak** trees but this specimen was on the coastal **whin/broom** area when it was found and photographed, a great find! (See also note below. Ed.)

The overnight moth trap, set up by David Lampard and Anne Reid at the lighthouse, caught 28 different species of moth which included the uncommon **shore wainscot**, first recorded for Angus the previous year.

The botanists had their usual field day and recorded the highest ever number (29 spikes) of **adders tongue fern**, a Barry Buddon special, plus **water dock**, **gipsywort** and **orchids** amongst others. All in all it proved to be a great day out for all present, catering for all interests and even the weather played its part with lots of sunshine.

Bob McCurley

## ANOTHER PURPLE HAIRSTREAK

After the exciting discovery of a **purple hairstreak butterfly** on the Barry Buddon outing (see above), Brian Williamson drew my attention to a report on the BBC website concerning another record of the butterfly.

It was found on 15th September at the visitor centre at Killiecrankie, near Pitlochry, by the centre manager, Ben Notley. He had never seen one before and speculated that it must be near the northern limit of its range. I wonder whether it is actually more common than we think in Scotland, but under-recorded due to its normal tree-top habitat. Keep looking up to the tops of the trees in **oak** woods next summer!

Anne Reid

## CARSEGOWNIEMUIR QUARRY

Barbecue and Bats

11th August

When we arrived at the cottage there were **swallows** everywhere, swooping around and perching in long lines on the wires. I had managed to persuade Christine to come and

help me to set up the barbecue, so, by the time everyone arrived all was ready to go. It was a dull, breezy evening but eventually a small party gathered near pond 2. The skies cleared somewhat but the wind continued to blow.

After suitable exploration of the quarry and some **ragwort** pulling, with Jim as guide and supervisor, everyone reappeared for the serious business of eating and we were joined by Ronnie and Loraine Young and their two lurchers, Millie and Purdey.

As darkness began to fall we once again set off to the far end of the site, this time with **bat** detectors at the ready, provided by David Lampard. A single 'squeak' was heard on the detector, but another was registered later near the cottage - both **pipistrelles**. The windy conditions had either deterred the bats or masked any sounds they were making. The dew fell quite heavily which made us glad of our wellies.

Over the course of the evening I took a series of photographs of the trees to record the good growth of the last few damp summers. A selection of these were then sent on to Margaret Duncan for her to see how much things had changed since she returned to her native New Zealand.

Anne Reid

## FALKLAND ESTATE

22nd August

Around 30 hardy souls boarded the bus on a rather dreich morning, but the forecast was promising as we set out for Falkland, a shorter than normal trip for a Saturday excursion. On arrival we made our way westwards through the very attractive streets to the gates of the estate. A brief description of the various routes available was made at the small car park, then we were off - in at least three different directions! It is not easy to get lost in the estate as Maspie Den and its burn leads up to the ranger centre and picnic site, with East Lomond and the road to Leslie on the left.

As forecast, the sun started to break through as the majority plodded up Maspie Den and criss-crossed the burn via the many well-made bridges. A number of **butterflies** were spotted on the way including **small copper**, **painted lady**, **green-veined white** and a **red admiral** on the roof of the dark tunnel. Davie Stein saw a **comma**, a species which is slowly colonising from further south. A recce earlier in the year also found **green hairstreak** near the ranger centre and many **orange tips** in the den.

While all the above was going on, a few hardy (or daft) souls scaled the heights of East Lomond to experience the dubious pleasure of being buffeted by the wind from three sides at the same time.

The botanical enthusiasts seemed to be happy in the heavily vegetated slopes of the den, but I'm not aware of any unusual finds, although there was a good selection of fungi.

By this time many were feeling the effects of sun and slope and had made their way to the Pillars of Hercules, the oddly-named local café with fruit and herb garden, to avail themselves of the home-grown fare. On return to the bus most agreed that the day had gone well, and, apart from a slight hitch on leaving the car park, everyone appeared to return to Dundee more or less in one piece.

Gordon Maxwell

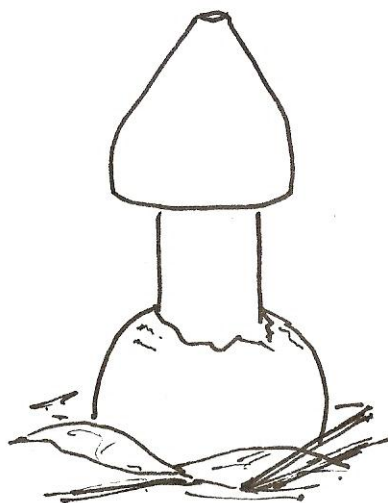
## GLAMIS

12th September

For this outing the Nats were accompanied by Keith Cohen, a well known mycologist who has led numerous Fungal Forays up and down the country.

We were dropped off by the bus driver at the Glamis village car park at 10am and made our way over to the woodland entrance. In true Nats style it took us longer than expected as there were numerous botanical specimens to examine en-route. As soon as we stepped into the woods we found our first few fungal specimens and spent a good 20 minutes

examining them, discussing them, photographing them and reading about them. We soon realized that that if we didn't hurry up a bit then we would miss our lunch, so again, in true Nats style we wandered off in our various groups and agreed that we would meet for lunch in the car park at 13.00 hours.



Stinkhorn newly emerged from egg

All in all we found almost 40 species of fungi - and although this certainly wasn't the most species ever found on a fungal foray what we lacked in quantity we made up for in terms of quality. Amongst the finds were **porcelain fungus** (*Oudemansiella mucida*), **turkey tails** (*Trametes versicolor*) and some rather old, dried out **chanterelles** (*Cantharellus cibarius*). My particular favourite of the day was the **stinkhorn** egg, (*Phallus impudicus*). It was found as a perfectly formed sphere and felt very soft and fragile. We were able to view the specimens when they were laid out on the table in the car park and - you've guessed it - discuss them and photograph them some more. We had an amazing walk in Glamis Woods with Keith and learned a host of new facts about fungi - the most important being which ones you could eat!

After lunch we drove to the RSPB Loch of Kinnordy Reserve and were met by one of the seasonal rangers who gave us all the latest information about the reserve. We learned about the benefits of introducing **highland cattle** to the reserve and about how the RSPB manages the reed beds. We also discovered that a **bittern** had paid a fleeting visit. We divided ourselves between the three bird hides and although there weren't a huge number of birds to see, and the **ducks** were in their eclipse plumage, we were treated to superb views of **marsh harrier**, which was a fitting end to a great day.

Kim Eberst

(A full list of the fungi found is available from Kim or from Anne Reid. Ed.)

## AUTUMN MEETINGS 2009

### UNDERWATER LIFE AROUND SCOTLAND

Iain Paul - 13th October

We have to thank Iain Paul for starting off this season's talks with an excellent account of Underwater Life around Scotland. Iain learned to dive in 1987 in England, however he moved to the north-east of Scotland in 1990. He took up underwater photography in 1998 and has used a number of underwater cameras. Since 2008 he has used a digital Nikon D80 camera in Sea and Sea DX-D80 housing.

Iain is a British Sub-aqua Club advanced diver, advanced instructor and instructor trainer and he carries out 80-100 dives each year, with time underwater largely split between photography and diver training. He started his talk by explaining how he got involved in diving and underwater photography. He has dived all round the Scottish coast, in a variety of weather conditions.

Iain progressed onto explaining about the different underwater habitats and how they affect the marine life - rocky bottoms, sandy bottoms, muddy bottoms, **kelp** forests and wrecks were all covered. He explained how depth affected what he saw, and also that good photographs depended not only on his subjects being obliging, but on the visibility in the water and the strength of the currents. Iain described one dive across a muddy bottom while waiting for a ferry. Although his dive companions found it boring, Iain noticed the bottom covered in **brittle stars** - relatives of the **starfish**.

Iain's talk then essentially took us on a trip through the various invertebrate and vertebrate groups of animals that can be found underwater, starting with **sponges**, **jelly fish**,

**sea anemones, soft corals, sea pens**, then to **crabs, shrimps, snails** and the spectacularly colourful **nudibranchs, starfish** and **brittle stars**. Iain finished up on **fish**, from the camouflaged **conger eels** to the colourful **wrasse**.

The hour and a half of this excellent talk rushed by with well over 50 images of marine life showing us the variety and colour of life off the Scottish coast.

David Lampard

## ANTARCTICA - LAND OF THE EMPERORS

Eric McCabe - 20th October

This was a lecture arranged jointly by five local groups - Dundee Naturalists' Society, the RSPB local group, Angus and Dundee Bird Club, SOC and SWT local groups. A charge was made for entry and proceeds were divided between the participating societies, after expenses had been met. This was a good way of generating income as we each benefitted by £100 and were treated to an excellent lecture with spectacular photography.

Eric described his visit to Antarctica on a Russian ice-breaker and all the wonderful opportunities for photography which this gave him. The excellent and varied images of ice formations, seals and the bird life enthralled us all. His particular favourite subject was the **Emperor penguins** and their chicks at their most northerly, and only accessible, breeding colony. The ship was able to approach the colony closer than usual and a helicopter and small boats allowed passengers to spend more time at the colony than on previous expeditions.

Our own Brian Ballinger chaired the talk and Jim Cook gave a heartfelt vote of thanks on behalf of the large number of people present from all the Societies.

Anne Reid

## BHUTAN, LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

Ian Fulton - 10th November

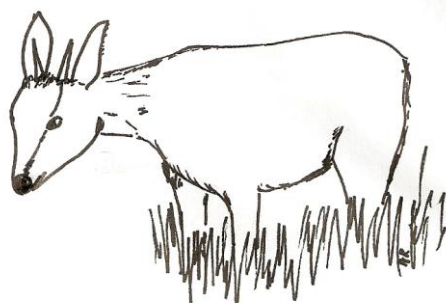
Ian began by describing his journey to Bhutan, with a stopover in Delhi, where he had a day to take photographs. His arrival at the tiny Poro airstrip was a hair-raising experience with a very small area between the mountains. Only three airline pilots are licensed to land there!

He explained that Bhutan is a very mountainous country landlocked by China, India, Bangladesh and Nepal. The tour, which lasted three weeks, was a combination of stops in towns with hotels and camping in more isolated parts.

Ian's images of the spectacular mountain scenery were superb and on the lower slopes the **magnolias** and **rhododendrons** were in flower. His bird photography was outstanding! Not only was he able to get images of the very hard-to-see **pheasants** and **monals** which inhabit the high Himalaya, but he had succeeded in photographing the skulking **thrushes** and many of the beautifully coloured species that inhabit these forests. Ian had also managed to capture images of three species of **monkey** and two strange **goat/antelope**-like animals called **takin** and **goral** as well as a very difficult to see **black bear** and her cub.

An extremely entertaining and interesting talk was greatly enjoyed by the large audience and I hope that Ian will be asked to return to speak very soon.

Dorothy Fyffe

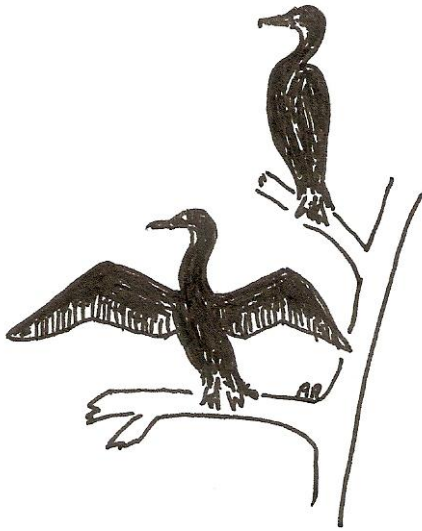


Goral

## BALGAVIES LOCH SWT RESERVE

14th November

Just over 20 turned up at the small reserve car park for the walk. This was a bit down on our usual turnout for these events, probably due to the recent wet weather (a barbecue autumn following a barbecue summer!?!). It was therefore thought wise to advise the less sprightly among us not to attempt the circuit of the loch due to flooding along stretches of the old railway section.



As it turned out, the majority managed the complete circuit with a few deviations from the normal route. The sight of the mink raft suspended in a loch-side bush reminded us of the heavy rainfall and high water levels of the last few weeks. An interesting feature of the walk was a small former railway building which had been recently refurbished by SWT volunteers to facilitate access for both **bats** and **swallows**. Despite the late time of year, a number of the commoner **mushrooms** and **puffballs** were seen (a foray next year?).

Perhaps the best part of the walk was the sight of hundreds of **greylag geese** along with a few **pinkfeet**, on the water. This was complemented by the sight of over 20 **cormorants** on a large tree on the small island, easily observed from the hide on the west side of the loch.

Overhead conditions had not been too bad and the company, reasonably dry, headed for the Royal Hotel in Forfar for lunch. The hotel had just changed hands and the staff were still adjusting to the new regime, but I heard of no serious shortcomings and all made their way home after the usual good blether.

Gordon Maxwell

## RETURN OF A NATIVE

Prof. Russell Coope - 24th November

**Polecats** in Scotland was the fascinating subject of this talk by Professor Russell Coope. He delivered a wonderfully clear exposition of polecats in times gone past in this country. They belong to the tribe of mustelids, the **weasels**, **stoats** and similar hunting animals, and once were widespread, probably distributed sparsely all over the country. As predatory animals, the species was finally exterminated from Scotland by changes in farming methods, habitats and, especially, by the traps and guns of land managers and gamekeepers. They almost disappeared in England as well, surviving only in a few isolated pockets along the Welsh Marches.

In the last 20 or so years, however, the reduction in keeping pressures has allowed the animals to increase in numbers and begin to spread out again. Although sparsely distributed, polecats are more common now in parts of Wales and Western and Central England than they have been for a long time. They also have appeared in other areas of the country, particularly in north-west England and south-west Scotland, and are spreading out from there. There are some suspicions that the spread has been helped along by human agency. A few have appeared in Perthshire and, in good time, may make their way across the Tay and into Angus.

Their size and colouring is distinctive: slightly smaller than a **pine martin** but larger than a **stoat**, with a very distinctive colouring of white face and muzzle and a black 'mask' around the eyes. Another notable feature is the pungent unpleasant odour, emitted from anal glands under the tail. The wild animals, though, should not be confused with the pale-coloured domesticated form, the **ferret**.

Polecats are solitary hunters and not often seen because they are largely nocturnal. Their numbers can be monitored through the records from the **mink** rafts which have been put in place in a number of our lochs to monitor and trap the non-native mink. Unlike mink, though, they do not frequent water-courses and, unlike martins, only rarely climb trees. Like all mustelids, they are active, agile and fearless hunters, able to subdue prey larger than themselves with a swift but powerful bite to the back of the neck. They feed on a variety of small animals and birds, from **rabbits** down to **mice** and **voles**, but one of their favourite prey animals is **rats**. In fact, they sometimes are recorded - such as by the use of camera traps - in close proximity to the type of old farmyard which harbours hordes of rats. In a rat colony the appearance of a polecat causes panic, and no wonder, since they are capable of great execution.

The sexes really only come together to breed. The females generally produce one or perhaps two litters a year of between five and eight kittens, in a den down an old rabbit burrow or hidden in rocks. The young are weaned at two months, being fed prey brought to them by their mother. Like stoats and weasels, the young animals are extremely active and playful, pouncing on each other and practising the bite to the back of the neck, ready to take up an independent life in the summer.

The lecture finished with an active question-and-answer session. The highlight of the evening, though, was when the professor introduced us to two live polecats, a male and a female. We all crowded round, fascinated, but he was careful to warn us not to put our fingers through the wire of the cages or else the animals would have something extra to spice up their diet!

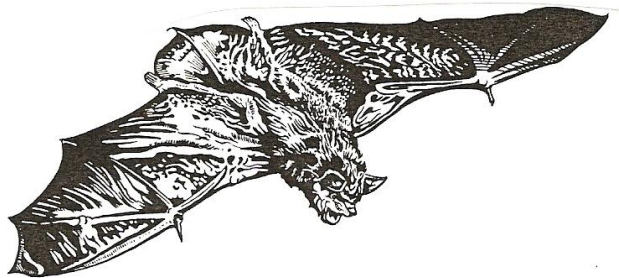
Jim Cook

## WORKING WITH BATS

Les Hatton - 8th December

Les Hatton is no stranger to the Nats and we were delighted to welcome him back, this time to talk about his work with bats. This subject may have come as a surprise to some, as Les has been known to us over the years first and foremost as a bird ringer, so it was with much interest and anticipation that we arrived to listen to Les speak on this new subject.

Needless to say we were not disappointed and Les entertained and educated us with numerous bat anecdotes and scientific facts. Of course no talk on bats would be complete without mentioning the most revered of all the bat species, the **vampire bat**, which was mentioned in the context of the food on which bats feed. When thinking



of what bats eat, we can be forgiven for thinking in parochial terms about the bats found in Scotland which eat **moths**, **flies**, **mosquitoes** and the like. Les, however, encouraged us to broaden our spheres of reference and soon we were hearing about bats that eat **fish**, **frogs**, **rodents**, the **blood of cattle** and even the odd drop of **human blood** - from those of our species careless enough to leave a big toe uncovered as they slept under the stars in far off lands. After this I'm sure that we all shared Les's admiration of the vampire bat, even if we didn't wish to be 'on its menu.'

We learned that the **noctule bat** wakes up and comes out to feed before the **pipistrelle bat** and, more importantly, that there have been records of this species in Fife. Noctule bats are tree dwellers and their favourite food is **beetles**. Les described the **Daubenton's bat**, which can be seen flying over water but which is, sadly, associated with rabies following the death of a Tayside bat worker a few years ago.

Another sad aspect of the evening's lecture was the various negative attitudes encountered by Les in the course of his work as a freelance Bat Consultant. Whilst we as naturalists would probably be over the moon to have a bat roost in our home or garden, not all members of the public share our enthusiasm. Les often finds himself as the sole advocate for

a bat colony in someone's loft or on land recently purchased by a company looking to develop it for house building or retail outlets. Fortunately, the law is on the side of the bats and Les can make sure that the law is adhered to, as long as he gets there before it's too late. We were very encouraged to hear about the work of Scottish Natural Heritage and the Bat Conservation Trust, and of course Les himself.

Just as we thought that Les was about to conclude his lecture, and we were all more than ready to burst into rapturous applause, Les produced the piece de resistance in the form of live **bats**. Tracy Jolliffe, a local bat worker who cares for rehabilitated bats that cannot fly and therefore cannot be returned to the wild, had brought along three bats - a **pipistrelle**, a **brown long-eared bat** and a **serotine bat**. The bats were used to being handled and we were able to get close-up views of each species as well as information about their care and feeding habits.

Once again an excellent lecture given by Les Hatton and thoroughly enjoyed by the Dundee Nats. However, I suspect, and I am sure that you will all wholeheartedly agree, that the real stars of the show were indeed, the bats.

Kim Eberst

Note: James Barbour took some photographs on his mobile phone and I submitted them, with a short report of the meeting, to the Courier. They did not manage to publish them, however - probably not short of other material to publish at this time of year. Ed.

## IN THE LIGHT OF EVOLUTION

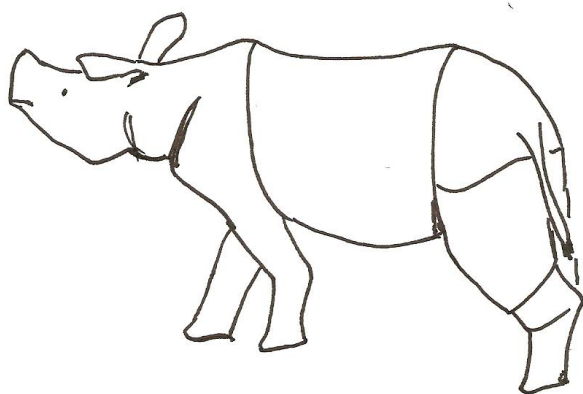
Neil Paterson - 9th December

Dr Neil Paterson, Education Officer at the Dundee Botanic Garden, gave a clear and well-illustrated account of Charles Darwin's development of the theory of evolution to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's famous book "The Origin of Species". This was part of the Wednesday Afternoon lecture series.

He described how the distribution of species around the world was a major factor in the formation of the original ideas, giving the distribution of **marsupial mammals** between the continents as one of the examples. The later understanding of continental drift explained some apparent discrepancies. The unique flora and fauna of islands such as Madeira and the Galapagos was another example, including the well-known **Galapagos finches**.

At the time of the book's publication the understanding of the fossil record was much less complete than it is now, but it provided no evidence to contradict the theory of evolution

and later discoveries have given confirmation of Darwin's work. The structure of organisms, such as the limb bones of six very different vertebrates, has tended to confirm the idea of a common origin. A cactus-like **Euphorbia** plant from Africa was a good illustration of convergent evolution. The three Asian **rhinoceros** species on different land masses appeared to have developed from a common ancestor.



Natural selection is often associated with fierce competition between individuals and a high

mortality rate. Darwin was not aware of Mendel's genetic work but this would have clarified some of the mechanisms involved.

Lord Kelvin's calculation that the earth was only about 100 million years old gave rise to problems in Darwin's time but an extension of this period following discovery of our planet's radioactivity and its molten core has given support to a more appropriate longer time frame. It is interesting that natural selection gave rise to imperfect structures such as the **mammalian retina**, in contrast to the more logical form of the **octopus eye**.

Neil commented that it was perhaps better that this lecture had taken place in room T9 rather than the D'Arcy Thompson Theatre this year as D'Arcy Thompson was not sympathetic to the evolutionary process. In spite of the overwhelming evidence for evolutionary theory Darwin's ideas still need to be defended against less enlightened views.

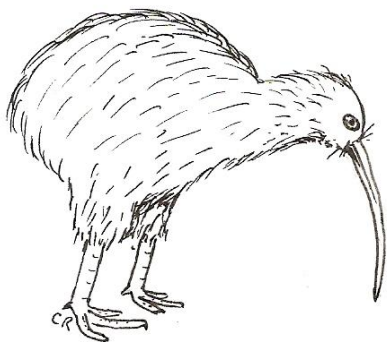
Brian Ballinger

## TRAMPS, KIWIS AND KAURI

Alban Houghton - 22nd December

Our Christmas meeting was well attended despite the very wintry weather. Just under 40 braved the snow and ice to hear Alban talk about warmer climes on the opposite side of the world.

Liz and Alban had worked their way from south to north in New Zealand visiting relatives and friends on the way. They undertook two long distance walks - known as 'tramps' locally - on well marked paths. One local contact took them to see **kiwis**, though no photographs were shown of the birds they found as their nocturnal habits made conditions too difficult. We were, however, shown a museum specimen and its egg. In proportion to the bird the egg is extremely large, almost as large as an **ostrich** egg despite **kiwis** being much smaller birds.

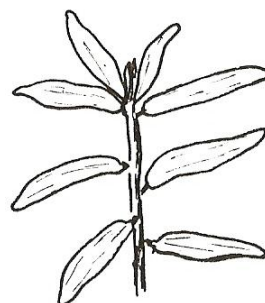


On North Island they visited former Nats member Margaret Duncan in her home near Auckland and found her to be well-settled back in her native land. The ancient **kauri** forests were also visited, some now sadly degraded. There are some fully

mature trees left in places and they are truly magnificent specimens. Birdsong was noticeably absent in many places visited due to the depredations of introduced predators, especially **possums**. A visit to an island nature reserve where such creatures have now been eradicated provided a contrast with abundant bird life.

After such an interesting journey through New Zealand we were all ready to tuck in to the festive baking so generously brought by members, washed down with tea or coffee. The opportunity for a good chat was enjoyed by all and my job was made easy by help from Christine and from Peter and Margaret Bainbridge - thanks to all.

Anne Reid



Kauri pine  
*Agathis australis*

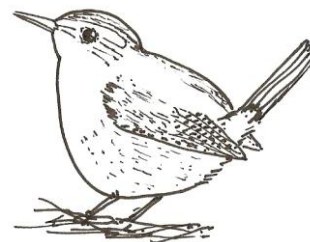
## MEMBERS' ARTICLES

### INTERESTING SIGHTINGS 2009

This compilation is intended to let people know what has been seen locally. 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.

Many of this year's records seem to be bird sightings, but that may represent the main interests of those who submit records! More urban **foxes** have been seen this year and it was much better for butterflies than 2008. Though only referred to a few times below, there was a record migration of **painted lady butterflies** in early June which reached all parts of Britain.

Brian Allan	BA	Monifieth
Brian Ballinger	BB	Dundee, West End
Joy Cammack	JoyC	Birkhill
Jim Cook	JC	Broughty Ferry
Monica Edwards	ME	Invergowrie
Peter Ellis	PE	Barry Mill
Dorothy Fyffe	DF	Carnoustie
Gordon Maxwell	GM	Lochee area
Bob McCurley	BMcC	Dundee
Daphne Macfarlane Smith	DMS	Broughty Ferry
Margaret McLaren	MMcL	Broughty Ferry
Margaret Palin	MP	Broughty Ferry
Roy Partington	RP	Dundee, West End
Anne Reid	AR	Monifieth
Brian Williamson	BW	Dundee, Law area



**2nd January** A **short-toed lark** seen on the cliffs at Arbroath. First ever record for Angus. BMcC.

**3rd January** Two **golden eagles** in Glen Moy. I was ready with binos this time because I have had previous sightings but was never 100% sure. The height they fly is a giveaway. JoyC.

**4th January** A **field vole** was presented to me by my local moggie, and then released. The first one I have seen in my back garden. GM.

**7th January** Six **roe deer** in field north of Dronley Woods. JoyC.

**9th January** The first **snowdrop** of the year (in exactly the same place); about the same time as last year. JC.

**27th January** While motoring along Albany Terrace I saw a **peregrine falcon** flying west towards me carrying what looked like a **pigeon**. It was heading in the direction of Cox's Stack, a regular roost. GM.

**30th January** A **blackcap** visited the feeders in our garden on The Law. The last sighting was in March 2008. **Goldfinches** have visited daily since I installed a thistle seed feeder. BW.

**30th January** A pair of **foxes** sleeping in the long grass opposite the Eden Estuary Hide at Guardbridge. They were both in good condition and eventually woke and moved off. GM.

**2nd February** Two **black redstarts** found at Westhaven. BMcC.

**9th February** I looked out of the kitchen window to see a male **blackcap** peering in at me from the **cotoneaster** bush 3 feet away. It was enjoying the warm sun and stayed long enough to give me a very good view. AR.

**11th February** I was surprised to see lots of **wrens** flying around my front garden, for the second time in a month. This time six of them crammed into the tit nest box and stayed there for a few minutes. Communal roosting is well known in wrens and the record is said to be 61 of the birds in one box! JoyC.

**12th February** Four inches of snow on ground which brought more birds into our garden than usual but most excited to see four **mistle thrushes** - two on Golden King **holly**, one in **crab-apple** and one in **amelanchier** - as I have never had them in garden before! DMS.

**16th February** The last snow and ice only went this morning but our garden pond is now seething with **frogs**. No **spawn** to see yet. BB.

**23rd February** Male and female **blackcaps** in the garden most days over the last two weeks. BB.

**24th February** First **moth** of the season, a **pale brindled beauty**, in the Dundee trap. It has been a slow season so far. BB.

**27th February** While in Shiell Street Nature Reserve, Broughty Ferry, saw three **redwing**, a pair of **bullfinches** and, best of all, a pair of **long-tailed tits** building a beautiful nest with lichens. I hadn't realised long-tailed tits nested so early in the year. DMS.

**27th February** 30 **waxwings** at Carnoustie. BMcC.

**1st March** On the walk home from church in Monifieth, I saw two queen **buff-tailed bumblebees** on **crocus** flowers in widely separated gardens. My first this year on a lovely sunny day. AR.

**8th March** First **buff-tailed bumblebee** (*Bombus terrestris*) and butterfly of the year, a **small tortoiseshell**, seen near Drumoig Hotel, Fife. DMS.

**9th March** A **bittern** was at Loch of Kinnordy. BMcC.

**10th March** A **peacock butterfly** over Grangehill Drive, Monifieth. BA.

**15th March** Unusual sighting of a **tree sparrow** in our garden. It appeared with a pair of **house sparrows**. On looking in book, to check features of female **tree sparrow**, I discovered the sexes are identical! I wonder why, of two seemingly similar species, one became dimorphic and the other did not. DMS.



**16th March** Several partly-eaten **frogs** and a strong smell, probably of **fox**, in the garden, or was the culprit a **heron**? BB.

**17th March** Four **magpies** seen in Glen Isla. JoyC.

**20th March** A large **fox**, red with tinges of grey, ran across the Monifieth Road close to Reres Park late at night. It jumped up to cross the high wall at the roadside but bounced off, ran back onto the road for a few paces and this time really accelerated to jump up onto the wall top and then over into a garden. MMcL

**24th March** A **wood mouse** on a peanut feeder in the garden. BB.

**25th March** Two **swallows** seen at Craigmill Den, an early record. BMcC.

**25th March** A **small tortoiseshell butterfly** at Dam Pond by Tealing. BB.

**29th March** In beautiful sunshine saw my first **7-spot ladybird** near Carlingheugh Bay and some **primroses** in flower on the cliffs nearby. AR.

**1st April** When visiting RSPB Loch of Kinnordy I found a **mallard** nest with 14 eggs by the Kirriemuir path at the side of the burn. GM.

**5th April** A **white stork** visited the grounds of Stracathro Hospital - it was not delivering babies! BMcC.

**5th April** A pair of **chaffinches**, a male and a female in breeding colours, were heard and seen tapping on a small clear window low on the side of the Kirk in the village of Fowlis Wester. Were they trying to get in or were they attracted by their reflections? There was no obvious cause but they continued for at least half an hour. MMcL. (Chaffinches are known to peck at their reflections in the breeding season, to defend territory against a perceived intruder. Ed.)

**9th April** First **willow warbler** of the year heard in Carsegowniemuir Quarry. JC.

**14th April** Enjoyed listening to, and then seeing, a **chiffchaff** down Castleroy Road, Broughty Ferry. DMS

**15th April** A **swallow**, two **willow warblers** and two **sand martins** appeared at Drumoig, Fife - first of the year for me. DMS.

**19th April** First **swallows** reported by the Youngs at Carsegowniemuir cottage. JC.

**19th April** My first **emperor moth** in Glen Moy, though I have seen the larva on a number of occasions previously. JoyC.

**25th April** Two **ravens** and two **ospreys** seen above Long Loch near Lundie Crag. JoyC.

**1st May** A **brimstone moth** in the garden. I probably disturbed it when moving some pots. ME.

**1st May** A pair of **mistle thrushes** seen on the wall beside my house. One was carrying food, so a probable nest in the vicinity. This in addition to one seen nearby last year. Not a common bird in an urban area. GM.

**8th May** Saw first **swift** of the year. DMS.

**5th May** A young **robin** in the garden - my first young bird of the year. ME.

- 12th May** A pair of **yellowhammers** in the garden around breakfast time. ME.
- 13th May** Another **emperor moth**, this time in the lower Tarmachan Mountains above Loch Tay. JoyC.
- 17th May** A **European nightjar** appeared at Craigmill Den and even allowed itself to be photographed. BMcC.
- 20th May** My first **swifts** of the season, over Monifieth on a lovely sunny morning. They seem scarce this year. AR.
- 21st May** A **woodcock** reported in the garden at Kingsway College. JC.
- 26th May** Late on a rather damp evening the first **hedgehog** of the season appeared in the garden and a few minutes later there was a **toad** hopping around, the first I've ever recorded in the garden. JC.
- 1st June** A rare **marsh warbler** was found at Springfield Park, Arbroath. BMcC.
- 2nd June** Bruce Lynch came to put rings on the two young **blue tits** in our box (a third was dead) - not a big brood. DMS.
- 3rd June** **Moonwort** seen on the path leading to Laird's Loch from Tullybaccart. GM.
- 3rd June** Saw three **painted lady butterflies** on my transect at Tentsmuir, presumably some of mass invasion from Morocco. On 6th had the first one in our garden. DMS.
- 11th June** A **red-necked phalarope** was seen feeding in a flooded field near Montreathmont Forest. BMcC.
- 15th June** A single **pipistrelle bat** briefly seen around the streetlight outside the back garden. JC.
- 18th June** A **fox** seen from my front door at 1.45am. It followed the same path as the **roe deer** seen here in 2008. GM.
- 2nd July** A **hummingbird hawkmoth** feeding on **valerian** in the garden. ME.
- 10th July** Three handsome **painted lady butterflies** were flitting about the garden. JC.
- 14th July** A **spoonbill** was seen at Montrose Basin. It stayed until the 18th. BMcC.
- 19th July** At the edge of Tentsmuir Forest I saw a flock of about 70 **swifts** probably gathering ready for migration. DMS.
- 22nd July** A large **hedgehog** was sitting on my back door-step when I came home late. After partly curling up, it soon beetled off. Perhaps it had been feasting on a large **slug**. I hope so; I'd noticed prominent slime trails on several recent mornings in the area and possibly they had attracted the hedgehog. JC.
- 28th July** Four young **swallows** being fed by two adults on my telephone line. They have obviously nested nearby. First ever evidence of nesting in my area, though adults have been seen previously. GM.
- 7th August** From my back door I saw about 20 **house martins**, high up, presumably feeding. No evidence of nests in the Lochee area. Have they come in from out of town? Weather sunny and warm with plenty of large trees nearby. GM.
- 8th August** A **treecreeper** seen and photographed in our west-end garden. Probably a juvenile which was relatively tame and easy to photograph. RP.
- 8th August** Two **kingfishers** seen on the Mill pond in the morning. Later on saw an **otter** there with one **kingfisher** still present. PE.
- 10th August** A **great spotted woodpecker** on the peanut feeder. ME.
- 18th August** As I arrived home at 5pm a **red squirrel** scampered away from the front garden. A neighbour's **cat** then gave chase. A very welcome visitor since **greys** were all we saw a few years ago. BB.
- 22nd August** Saw six species of butterflies while walking round transect route at Tentsmuir - of the 284 counted, 202 were **painted ladies**! Astonishing when, in past years, we've only recorded one or two. They must have been the offspring of those that migrated in June. DMS.
- 27th August** Maximum number of butterflies in garden, nearly all on **buddleia** - 19 **peacocks**, 16 **painted ladies**, two **small tortoiseshell** and two **red admiral**. Amazing when compared with the few butterflies seen for the whole of last year! DMS.



**8th September** An amazing 1754 **pied wagtails** were counted at the Seagate, Dundee roost. BMcC.

**12th September** Had 11 **long tailed tits** in the garden. JoyC.

**19th September** Five **geese** flying low over Broughty Ferry. A couple of larger groups seen and heard later in the same week. Autumn again! AR.

**19th September** A **little egret** seen at the ponds below Station Crescent in Invergowrie. It was roosting in the trees, low down so you could see its whole reflection in the water. ME.

**21st September** Saw a **little egret** along the coastal path between St Andrews and Boarhills, near the Buddo rock stack. Also saw a couple of **gannets**. JoyC.

**22nd September** A single blue-phase **snow goose** was spotted amongst a flock of 51,000 **pinkfeet** at Montrose Basin. BMcC.

**8th October** At Lunan Bay ADBC Hide, a clear calm sunny day was excellent for watching sea ducks and other water birds, such as **red-throated diver**, **black-throated diver**, **great crested grebe**, **long-tailed duck**, **common** and **velvet scoter** and juvenile **gannets**. BW.

**11th October** A female **bullfinch** seen eating **rowan** berries in the garden. Very hard to spot amongst the colouring leaves and red berries. MP.

**12th October** A **chiffchaff** was heard calling from the top of a **sycamore** tree in Carnoustie. DF.

**12th October** Saw a **red kite** from Craigean na Beinne, between Loch Earn and Comrie. JoyC.

**12th October** A male **common darter** sunning itself on the conservatory wall. ME.

**19th October** Walking back home from the Nats meeting I was turning off the Perth Road just beyond the Sinderins when a **fox** calmly crossed the road just ahead of me. BB.

**22nd October** A **Radde's warbler**, a very rare passage migrant from Siberia, was found at Easthaven. Elsewhere in Angus in the same 'fall' were three **yellow-browed warblers**, 11 **black redstarts** and 10 **firecrests**. BMcC.

**22nd October** A **maggie** in the garden, the first we have ever seen here. BB.

**24th October** A flock of about a dozen **fieldfares** chattered and fluttered around the far end of Carsegowniemuir Quarry for a few minutes before disappearing off towards the nearest woodland. JC.

**30th October** Ten **grey partridge** flew off, while I was playing golf at Drumoig - the most I've ever seen there. DMS.

**5th November** A mob of busy **long-tailed tits** moved into our wild cherry trees for a passing visit. BW.

**6th November** A **red admiral butterfly** feeding on **verbena** and basking in the sun on the back wall of the house. ME.

**7th November** Several **small tortoiseshell butterflies** warmed themselves in the weak sun on the south-facing wall of the house. JC.

**7th November** Delighted to see **goldfinches** in my garden for the first time this winter on the nyger-seed feeder and **greenfinches** started to arrive too. BW.

**15th November** A late **swallow** was seen at Monifieth. BMcC.

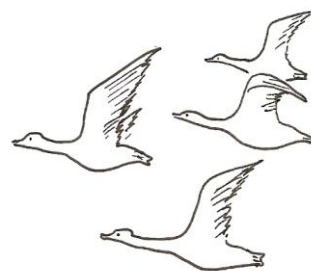
**17th November** The melodious singing in a tall tree behind the City Churches, Nethergate was that of a **goldfinch**. BW.

**24th November** About forty **fieldfares** perched briefly in a **birch** tree near our house but, sadly, none visited our garden. DMS.

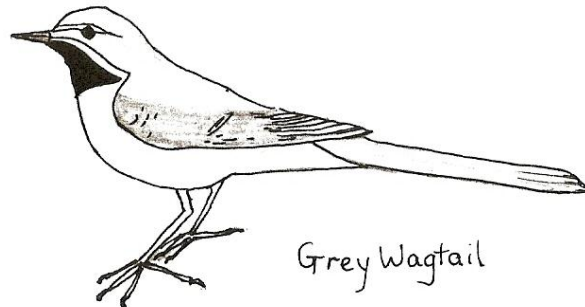
**27th November** A **pied wagtail** bobbing up and down in Caldrum Street, Hilltown, Dundee on the paved path. BW.

**28th November** A single large **blowfly** buzzed into the house through the open back door. Presumably it had come into the house to escape the cold outside but it would have done better to have remained outside. It didn't last long! JC.

**1st December** A **woodcock** flew away from the tall **willowherb** inside the southern boundary of Carsegowniemuir Quarry and along into one of our small plantations. JC.



- 6th December** A **winter moth** in the Dundee trap. It is still worth looking for moths in December. BB.
- 8th December** My usual two resident **blackbirds** were joined by at least six 'incomers', presumably on migration and looking for an easy meal. DF.
- 10th December** At the Eden Estuary hide, Guardbridge, at low tide a flock of c. 2300 **golden plover** disturbed by a **buzzard** rose into the sunshine to give a splendid aerial spectacle. **Red-breasted merganser**, **little grebe**, a **kingfisher**, **black-tailed godwit**, **dunlin** and all the usual waders made an appearance that afternoon. BW.
- 10th December** I disturbed a **sea eagle** just below the summit of Ark Hill. It then flew off towards Kinpurnie Hill, circled back towards me and landed out of sight. On my return I saw quite a lot of guano where it must have landed. JoyC.
- 12th December** In the Verdant Works Heritage Museum courtyard, Dundee, I was surprised to see a **grey wagtail** feeding on insects between the cobblestones. BW.
- 13th December** A **blackcap** appeared for the first time this winter in my garden on The Law. BW.
- 15th December** A flight of seven **teal** were disturbed off the partly-frozen surface of the largest pond, number 5, in Carsegowniemuir Quarry, the largest number seen at one time in the Quarry. The place was still partly flooded, the remnants of the deluges in November; over a month of floods, the longest period ever. JC.
- 17th December** **Snow** arrived and remained, with some additional snow/sleet, to the end of the year .. and beyond! DMS. (The result was **winter thrushes**, and even **brambling** venturing into gardens. Ed.)
- 27th December** Near the shore on Barry Buddon I saw a **mistle thrush** perched on a **willow**. A **sparrowhawk** appeared and went for the thrush, but then, apparently, thought the better of it and flew off. Perhaps a **mistle thrush** is too aggressive to be easy prey! AR.



## CULLED FROM THE COURIER

There seemed to be fewer articles of natural history interest in the newspapers than usual this year. One report which particularly caught my attention, resulting from the British Science Festival in September, stated that biodiversity on intensively farmed arable land would be greatly increased by building houses on it. Gardens contain an increasingly important proportion of our native wildlife, even though they cannot replicate all habitats.

Nearer to home, in September the Courier reported that Scottish seabirds had had their best breeding season for almost a decade, though the RSPB suspected that this may just be a 'blip' in a generally downward trend. **Arctic terns** on Orkney reared over 200 chicks at the North Hill reserve, where no chicks were fledged in 2008. Fowlsheugh had good breeding figures for **fulmars**, **kittiwakes** and **herring gulls**.

A **springtail** less than 1mm long found in the Cairngorms has been confirmed as a new record for the UK and was reported in the autumn. The tiny *Bourletiella viridescens* was found by a photographer, Tim Ransom, who posted the image online from which its identification was confirmed. The island of Coll also has a first for Scotland. A **short-necked oil beetle**, *Meloe brevicollis*, was found there in the summer. It had been thought to be extinct in Britain but was rediscovered in South Devon in 2007. Digital photography certainly makes this kind of recording and confirmation of identification much easier. Who knows what will turn up next?

Anne Reid

## CRESTED TITS COME FOR THE PEANUTS

23rd January

A visit to the locked Osprey Hide at Loch Garten, Speyside in winter was brightened when we noticed well-stocked bird feeders attracting numerous **coal tits**, **blue tits** and **great tits**, but amongst them were beautifully marked **crested tits** that we could watch at close quarters as we sat sheltered from the wind. Crested tits are restricted to the pinewoods of this region of Scotland. We also saw a couple of crested tits at Abernethy Dell Nature Reserve, Nethy Bridge, but they made only fleeting visits to the feeders and were more difficult to approach.

Brian Williamson

## FROM MY KITCHEN WINDOW

In similar fashion to recent years 50 or so **frogs** appeared in the pond in early March which resulted in plenty of **spawn**. Some of this was provided for Carsegowndiemuir. The local Botanic Garden **heron** visited regularly during April, dispatching frogs with expertise. They were caught by the head and shaken to full length before being swallowed.

A single **fox**, probably a vixen, was seen occasionally watching not only frog activity, but also the daily routine of our neighbour's recently acquired **hens**. One of the six rescued, happy and tame battery birds was snatched when allowed out too early one morning. The outer run is more secure now and I am on fox alert, with back-up from **herring gulls**. A pair of these nested between our chimney stacks, raising two chicks from a likely four eggs. I witnessed the vixen, with her full-grown cub, being dive-bombed across the lawn and into the shrubbery.

After much noise and wing flapping from the chicks, and extra encouragement from their parents and extended family, they made their first flight at the end of May while I was away on the Nats spring weekend.

Jean Colquhoun

## AN EASTER KITE

5th April

While watching a group of children on an Easter-egg hunt on the top of the Knock at Crieff, I was surprised to see a **red kite** float past. The forked tail, the wing shape and buoyant flight were all so characteristic and then it turned and the sun highlighted the red colour on its back. Just then someone else called out "Look, there's a kite!" and several eyes turned to watch the bird disappear round the back of the hill.

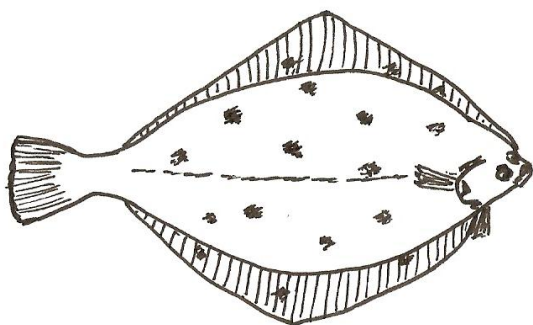


Red kite

Margaret McLaren

## OSPREY HAS PLAICE FOR TEA

Quietly watching the usual waders and ducks at low tide at the Eden Estuary Hide in mid April, Gordon Maxwell and I suddenly wondered what had caused flocks to take off in excitement downstream. There was an **osprey** high in the air above the channel being mobbed by **gulls**. The osprey gradually flew upstream towards us, constantly challenged by



**lesser black-backed gulls** and **crows**, until it was flying immediately in front of the hide. The osprey dropped suddenly to about 50 feet above the water, hovered briefly and then plunged to take a **plaice** from the river bed in its talons and carried the fish to a fence post across the river, incessantly dive-bombed by the gulls. No peace to eat fish here! A better spot on the grassy bank opposite the hide proved to be more practical for a meal, but now about a dozen crows wanted to have

some scraps too. The show finally ended when this splendid adult male osprey flew south with the remains of his fish, perhaps to a waiting partner.

Brian Williamson

## RUSTS ON THE RIVERSIDE

19th May

During the spring evening walk (Jim's extra Tuesday outings. Ed.) along the River Tay, near Tayport, Gordon Corbet drew my attention to two interesting **rust** diseases he found on plants on the river bank that both caused characteristic distortion of stems and leaves. The **creeping thistle** (*Cirsium arvense*) was heavily infected by the rust fungus *Puccinia punctiformis*. This is an autoecious rust (with only one host plant species) and forms all five possible spore stages of a rust (macrocyclic). In fact the brown pustules present on these plants were the aecia, the second stage in rust development, and this can be so serious an infection that scientists have tried to use the organism as a **mycoherbicide** to control the **thistle** in pasture.

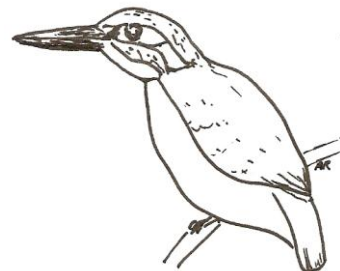
**Sweet cicely** (*Myrrhis odorata*) was affected by another autoecious rust fungus, *Puccinia chaerophylli*. The pustules (aecia) containing yellow spores (aeciospores) were abundant on the undersides of many leaves and this infection also caused distorted growth of the plant. Aecia of this rust have been recorded on other members of the Umbelliferae, such as **cow parsley** (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), **golden chervil** (*Chaerophyllum aureum*) and **rough chervil** (*C. temulum*). Later in the season the pustules become rusty brown in colour as the uredinia develop and finally telia appear in late summer and bear teliospores that serve as survival structures through winter.

Brian Williamson

## BIRD RECORDING BENEFITS

Enthused by David Lampard's recording day, I signed up to survey two local tetrads (2km x 2km) for breeding birds. The best habitats around Letham are gardens and a few wilder corridors like Vinney Den. Though intensive arable farming is not noted for species diversity, some **larks** seem to get by and the occasional **sedge warbler** chatters from the edge of an oilseed rape field.

Trying to unobtrusively count garden **blackbirds**, **robins**, **wrens** and **tits** was a bit tricky as one did the two hour stint. Comments included 'Spying on us, mister?'. However, getting up early before the roar of commuting traffic was a rewarding experience. It was a delight to hear the migrant warblers belting out their love-songs and drumming **woodpeckers** sounded out clearly. I was really pleased when I found that a pair of **kingfishers** are still nesting on the Vinney despite the civic vandalism that destroyed a previous nesting site.



Roving records of **eagles**, **ptarmigan** and **snow buntings** (and anything else! - Ed.) in the Highlands and Islands are also wanted, but the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) particularly values timed visits to your chosen patch so that bird numbers can be estimated, rather than the map showing birdwatcher distribution. My advice is to pick any area that has not been bagged by someone else. There are lots in remote areas but there are still ones closer to home. You never know what you might discover. The Atlas Bird Survey can be found at [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org).

Alban Houghton

## BTO BIRD ATLAS 2007-11

Alban was recording for the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11 project which still has a year to run, with two summer and one winter seasons left (as at March 2010). I can personally recommend recording, and know a number of other Nats are also participating.

Particular help is needed with records of breeding birds, which have not yet achieved confirmed breeding status. Lists of birds in each 10km grid square can be found on the Atlas website along with the breeding codes. All Nats who are out and about between April and July this summer can submit evidence of breeding by, for example, seeing an occupied nest, or an adult with food, as 'Roving Records' on the Atlas website or give them to me for submission.

If you feel you would like to contribute your records, or have any queries, then get in touch with the Angus Regional organiser, Bruce Lynch, on [b\\_lynch1@sky.com](mailto:b_lynch1@sky.com) or contact me for further information.

Anne Reid

## RAZORBILLS, GUILLEMOTS AND FULMARS ON PARADE

June on the Isle of May

On a calm warm day in June I sailed on the *May Princess* from Anstruther across the Forth to the beautiful Isle of May. **Grey seals** bobbed up to check on us as we drew close to the rocks. This island is home to 20,000 nesting pairs of **puffins**, and thousands of **guillemots**, **razorbills** and **shags**. After a briefing to passengers by the SNH Ranger about the need to stay on paths, to protect vulnerable nesting birds, and to avoid falling into puffin burrows and crushing their solitary chicks underground, we set off to explore the island. Blooms of **thrift**, **sea campion** and **silverweed** carpeted many areas of the foreshore.

I lingered by the small harbour inlet, as the other passengers dispersed, to watch a group of **arctic terns** on the rocks across the water. These birds nest on the high ground near the main lighthouse, but they have not had good success in raising young on the island in the last couple of years and so their nesting sites are closely protected here. A **rock pipit**, with its striped and speckled breast and black legs, alighted on a rock a couple of yards away from my telescope, and a female **eider** shuffled off quietly into the water nearby.

The south and west sides are flanked by basalt cliffs up to 150 feet high. The eroded **basalt** provides perfect angular ledges for nesting seabirds and they crowd every cranny. The handsome **razorbills**, with their fine white striped bills and 'eyeliner', jostled with **guillemots** 'dressed for dinner' in their smart plumage, some showing the white curving line behind the eye (the bridled form). **Shags** had successfully hatched chicks already, but these fluffy grey youths would need more feeding before they flew off the crags. **Kittiwakes** and **fulmars** occupied other small ledges nearby and looked snowy white



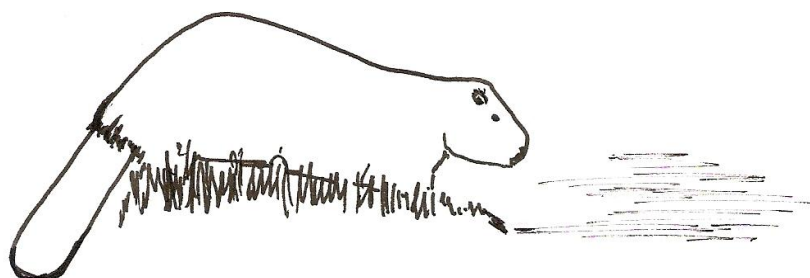
compared to the other black characters on show. **Herring gulls** and **lesser black-backed gulls** constantly roamed the ledges trying to find unattended eggs or chicks and a **peregrine falcon** is a local resident too!

Studies have shown that the **rabbits** are an essential component of the island ecosystem because they graze the tall grass species that would otherwise dominate the upland areas and prevent the **puffins** finding good nest sites in the turf. It was good to see that the breeding puffins were returning to their burrows constantly from the sea laden with **sand eels** for their chicks waiting underground. As we sailed away, we watched the **gannets** cruising effortlessly back to the Bass Rock flying just above the waves in long lines like pearls on a string. This was a day to remember.

Brian Williamson

## BEAVERS IN SCOTLAND

I am interested in the reintroduction of the **European beaver**, *Castor fiber*, to Scotland following discussions with a couple of people who are opposed, one because of a commitment to fisheries and the other who claims *Castor canadensis* (**North American beaver**) causes great damage in Saskatchewan and, thus, lacking large predators, thinks that *Castor fiber* will do the same in Scotland. So I consulted a number of documents from different sources on the web. The guide who talked to us at Archaeolink (on the Inverurie weekend - see page14) seemed to suggest that beavers didn't build dams in Scotland, hence our Mesolithic ancestors felt free to take beaver-felled saplings to act as posts for their huts. Och aye - perhaps the guide took the Nats for tree-hugging furry animal lovers? Anyway, according to [www.treesforlife.org.uk](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk) *C. fiber* does indeed build dams, usually on shallow streams so as to raise the water level above the burrow entrance. European beavers prefer burrowing into river banks to constructing lodges, but they will do that if there are no nice muddy banks.



The animal we are reintroducing is a smaller and less active animal than *Castor canadensis* and the 13 European countries (possibly 24 eventually) which have reintroduced the large rodents have developed control methods such as removal of dams, overflow piping, rabbit or deer-proof type fencing and, if the population gets a little more than merely sustainable, licensed hunting. Beavers are good to eat, have useful skins and also secrete castoreum from the anal glands for territorial marking. All of these attributes led to their original extirpation, especially as the castoreum was thought to have analgesic properties.

I bet Mesolithic Person made full use of the beaver, regardless. Since they probably took the elaborately cured skins, used to make huts, along with them when moving sites, I'll also bet that, like the North American native people they took along the poles too. You might not have time to hang around waiting for the beavers to fell the lumber at your next stop. Re-erecting the tepee was a woman's job, by the way: no doubt the same applied in Scotland's Mesolithic.

Alison McAdam

Note: Another good website for beaver information is [www.scotsbeavers.org/](http://www.scotsbeavers.org/) Ed.

## EARLY FEEDING OF THE MOUNTAIN BUMBLEBEE

The **mountain** or **bilberry bumblebee** (*Bombus monticola*) has declined by 25% or more in Scotland over the last 25 years. Scotland is, however, still the stronghold for this bee in the UK. Mountain bumblebees are relatively small with a reddish orange abdomen and a white stripe across the head, unlike the **red-tailed bee** (*Bombus lapidarius*) which does not have a white stripe. The bee is a priority biodiversity action plan species in the UK. Guides and descriptions give the habitat of the bee as hills and mountain sides above 300m (984 feet), feeding on **bilberry** and **heather** flowers.

Observations in 2009 suggest that this bee has a much wider range of habitat and choice of nectar plant than suggested in the literature.

In April this year I was looking for the bee and I followed the guides, looking for it on hills above 300m. There are previous records on the Sidlaws; however the national biodiversity network website shows the nearest sightings to Dundee to be in Glenshee or in the hills near Menmuir. After a few unsuccessful visits to likely sites, I was about to give up and try again later in the year.

However I received a report that **mountain bumblebee** had been seen in Abernethy, but that they were feeding on **flowering currant** *Ribes sanguineum*. A week later there was a positive identification of mountain bumblebees feeding on flowering currants in the grounds of Kindrogan field centre. I went out to see for myself and after twenty minutes of staking out the flowering currant bushes I found the bees on **dandelions** in the lawn.

In May *Bombus monticola* were also seen at Crombie Country Park, feeding on **dandelion** and **rhododendron**, though there are areas of **heather** and **bilberry** in the Park.

A single mountain bumblebee was also seen on the Nats outing to Aberfeldy, in June feeding on **bird's foot trefoil**. A single male was also found, in mid July, on **carline thistle** at the foot of the cliffs at Arbroath, probably the last of a lowland colony. Later in the year, however, mountain bumblebees seemed to be in their rightful place on mountains feeding on bilberry and heather and heath flowers.

So is there a reason for this apparent non standard behaviour?

The most probable reason is that mountain bumblebee is not a specialist feeder. The early year observations are of queen bees newly emerged from hibernation. They are taking advantage of early flowering plants before their main food plants come into flower. However this also shows that they will travel some distance from their ideal habitat. Bilberry can flower from April and the heathers and heaths flower from June. The bees probably follow their chosen plants up the mountains, as those at higher altitude probably flower later in the season. This ability to exploit is a great advantage to the mountain bumblebee as it emerges before its main food plant flowers.

This behaviour does not seem to have been reported before. The behaviour may actually have been observed, but, on checking the references, the observers have been convinced they misidentified the bees, i.e. they were in the 'wrong' place, feeding on the 'wrong' plants

This year seemed to be a good season for the mountain bumblebees up until June and July.

David Lampard



Blaeberry or bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*

## A NEW RARE PLANT FIND IN ANGUS

Most people will be familiar with the **lady's mantle** grown by many gardeners for its foliage. I notice that in Dundee the **silver lady's mantle** (*Alchemilla conjuncta*) is a popular plant which most naturalists will know grows wild in Glen Doll. The other common garden plant is **soft lady's mantle** (*Alchemilla mollis*), now escaped and pretty-well established in the wild throughout Great Britain.

In Britain there exist 16 species of lady's mantles, most of which are easily identified, some being more distinct than others. In Angus there are ten species altogether, of which two are almost certainly introductions. One species is a new discovery in Angus - **silky lady's mantle** (*Alchemilla glaucescens*). To date the only other locations for this plant are on limestone grasslands in Yorkshire, Wester Ross and West Sutherland. How this was discovered may be of interest.

Barbara Hogarth (BSBI recorder for Angus) and I were doing our usual routine botanising of a new area in the upper Glen Clova area. In this particular site there is a calcareous band of rock running through the hillside leading to a rich assemblage of plants including **rockrose** and two species of **oat grass** (*Helictotrichon* sp.) which would give a good clue to its possibilities, botanically speaking.

There is a steep stream gully which cuts through the hillside which we followed, carefully noting the plants. We found large swathes of **wood vetch** (*Vicia sylvatica*), **globeflower** (*Trollius europaeus*), large sweeps of **mountain catsfoot** (*Antennaria dioica*), plenty of **early purple orchids** (*Orchis mascula*), **lady's finger vetch** or **kidney vetch** (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), **aspens** (*Populus tremula*), **bulbous buttercup** (*Ranunculus bulbosus*), four species of **saxifrage**, **mountain golden rod** (*Solidago virgaurea*) and **mountain pansy** (*Viola lutea*), to name but a few.

In addition we found four species of **lady's mantle** (*Alchemilla* spp.) and the curious plant, a very small hairy lady's mantle which did not fit into any category of *Alchemilla* that we were familiar with. Barbara took a piece home and cultivated it. That was in 2008. This year it grew into a fine plant with good foliage. She tentatively identified this as *Alchemilla glaucescens* (**silky lady's mantle**). A sample was sent to Dr Margaret Bradshaw, the BSBI referee for *Alchemilla*, who confirmed that Barbara was right. Since this find we have been keen to look at lady's mantles more carefully. We have now traced the plant over a much wider area and at present there is no obvious threat to these plants.

Pat Gaff

## ERGOT ON MARRAM GRASS AT BARRY BUDDON

During the visit in August to Barry Buddon, Davie Stein drew my attention to **ergot** in the flower heads of **marram grass** (*Ammophila arenaria*) with **ants** crawling all over these flowers. The fungus ergot (*Claviceps purpurea*) occurs on most grasses and cereals, and marram grass is commonly affected. The presence of ants was significant because insects love the sweet sticky **honeydew** secreted by infected flowers - visiting insects unwittingly carry single-celled spores (**conidia**) present in the honeydew to other flowers, thus starting another infection.



The biology and life cycle of this fungus is interesting. Infected flowers of cereals, as in marram grass, develop conspicuous black fungal resting bodies (**sclerotia**) instead of fertilised ovules. These sclerotia fall to the ground and lie dormant over winter. In spring they germinate to produce several stalked structures (**perithecial stromata**) resembling tiny toadstools; embedded within each perithecial stroma are numerous flask-shaped **perithecia** (the sexual stage of the fungus) that release needle-shaped spores (**ascospores**) that are explosively ejected into the air to be carried on the wind to other susceptible plants to complete the fungal life cycle.

Interestingly, this fungus produces several poisonous alkaloids of historical and medical significance. In past times these caused outbreaks of poisoning of man and his domestic animals. The symptoms are dramatic

and frightening, described in Mediaeval times as 'St. Anthony's fire', when infected cereals had been harvested and the fungal sclerotia mixed with the grain at milling to contaminate the flour used to make bread. Burning sensations in the fingers and toes, the nervous dysfunction, such as writhing, tremors and wryneck, or unpleasant psychotic experiences, visual illusions and hallucinations account for this strange behaviour. Some authorities suspect that, centuries ago, such symptoms were the cause of the notorious outbreaks of witch-craft.

One of the alkaloids, ergotamine, is now obtained from laboratory-grown cultures and is used to induce uterine contractions during childbirth. Modern grain-screening methods and rigorous food inspections have reduced the risk of this type of poisoning greatly, but organic farming methods that exclude the application of fungicides favours this fungus, especially in rye crops.

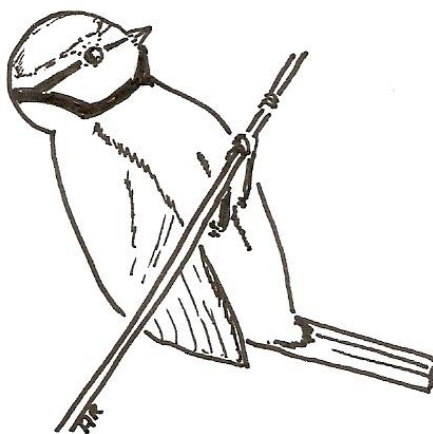
For more information see '*Poisons of the past: molds, epidemics and history*' by Mary K. Matossian (1989), Yale University Press, London, 190 p.

Brian Williamson

## A GOOD MEAL

2nd October

It was an autumnal morning. We'd had light rain early on but the sun was trying to break through. I was peering out of the window to identify the butterfly which had landed on the frame, but it had moved on. I glanced down at the *Verbena bonariensis* in case it had flown down on to the flowers. In the space of a few seconds I noticed a **blue tit** hanging on to one of the flower stems and, as it flew I spotted the butterfly, a **red admiral**, on a flower nearby. The blue tit swooped on the butterfly and dived into the adjacent hedge to deal with its prize. I can only suppose that the relatively low temperature meant that the butterfly was just too slow to evade capture.



Anne Reid

## A FISHY BUSINESS

December

On Boxing Day I received an e-mail as follows:

"Hi Anne, On Christmas Eve we went for a walk from Monifieth waterfront to Broughty Ferry and decided to return via the beach as the tide was out. Strolling along, as you do, looking for little "treasures" on the shore, we came across this dead fish. It looked like a foreigner to this area so I took out my old brick of a telephone and snapped it for the record and identification. We've never seen anything like it this far north in Britain. Lengthwise it was about 14 inches and height about 10 inches. Hope you had a nice Christmas see you at the next meeting.

Stewart and Jean MacKenzie

PS. A suggestion has been made that it is a Ray's bream."

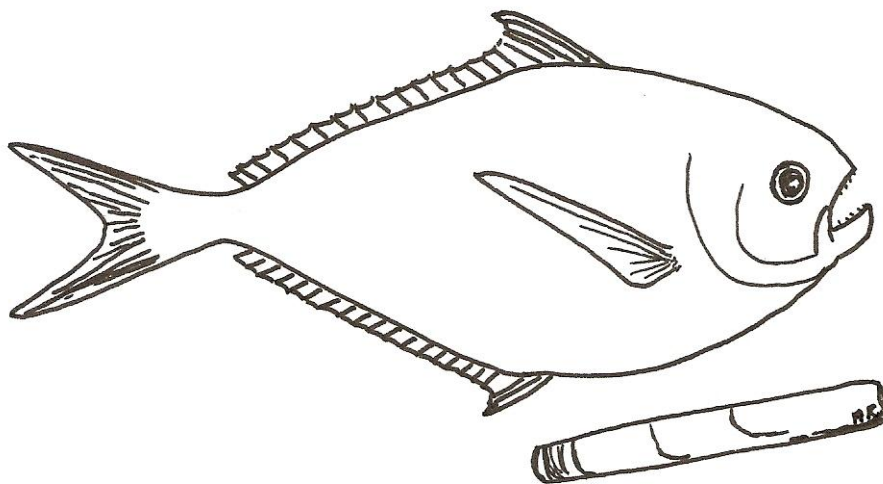
There were photographs attached, and when I looked up **Ray's bream** in the fish book it did, indeed, seem to be that species. A swift check on Google produced quite a lot of information. The fish is present in our waters in small numbers all the year round but moves

north in autumn. There are regular reports of single specimens washed up on beaches all around the British coast - the reporting rate is probably quite high because it is such a striking fish. The website for the British Marine Life Study Society [www.glaucus.org.uk](http://www.glaucus.org.uk) has reports of regular finds of this fish on east coast beaches, and more information. The MacKenzies were happy to get the extra information and confirmation of identification and I considered whether it was "Bulletin-worthy".

On Sunday 27th December Mary and I went for a walk along the beach from Monifieth towards the Barry Buddon lighthouse - all the hard-packed snow had made beaches the only safe place to walk. Believe this if you will! We found ANOTHER Ray's bream on the beach along there. We found it because there was a **herring gull** staying put and obviously feeding on something worthwhile. I shooed the gull away and couldn't believe my eyes when I saw what it was. The fish was much the same size as the first one, and I also have photos to prove it. Has anyone else ever seen one of these striking fish - you would probably remember if you had!

Anne Reid

Postscript: A photograph of a "mystery fish", which was clearly another Ray's bream, appeared in the Courier in early January. It had been found at Monifieth and a request for information was added. I duly supplied this and a short piece was published a couple of days later. Ed.



Ray's bream, from a photograph by Anne Reid  
The razor shell is 8in (25cm) long