

# **DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

## **ANNUAL BULLETIN No 37**

### **2012**

Hon President:	Dr Gordon Corbet
Hon Vice Presidents:	Mr Bede Pounder Mr Richard Brinklow
President:	Mrs Anne Reid
Vice Presidents:	Mr Brian Allan Mr David Lampard
Hon Secretary:	Mrs Lorna Ward, 30 Portree Avenue, Broughty Ferry, Dundee. DD5 3EQ (01382 779939)
Membership Secretary:	Mrs Margaret McLaren, 12 Kerrington Crescent, Broughty Ferry, Dundee. DD5 2TN (01382 779422)
Hon Treasurer:	Miss Dorothy Fyffe, 33 Ireland Street, Carnoustie, Angus. DD7 6AS (01241 853053)
Excursion Secretary:	Mr Davie Stein, 13, Livingstone Place, Dundee. DD3 8RL (01382 816863)
Bulletin Editor:	Mrs Anne Reid, 2 East Navarre Street, Monifieth, Dundee. DD5 4QS (01382 532486) email – <a href="mailto:acmc.reid@virgin.net">acmc.reid@virgin.net</a>

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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, Christine Reid, Mary Reid, Leonore Goodliffe, Clipart and Artfile. Two pages of colour photographs have been included this year.

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

Thanks to all members who have submitted articles and reports, especially those who have done so for the first time this year - I think this is the longest Bulletin yet! Thanks to Jim Cook and Mary Reid for proof reading and helpful comments (Mary via e-mail again this year).

Contributions for the next Bulletin, articles, line drawings and photos, are always welcome and may be submitted at any time during the year.

We now have a website at [www.dundeenats.org.uk](http://www.dundeenats.org.uk)

Anne Reid

## SOCIETY REPORTS

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This year's activities have been broadly similar to those of recent years and the details can be found elsewhere in this Bulletin. The winter lectures were, on the whole, well attended but, despite membership numbers remaining fairly stable, the summer outings were so poorly attended that it was necessary to subsidise most. As the cost of coaches increases it is difficult to see a way out of this predicament without increasing prices. If more people came it would cost less - bring your friends!

Despite perceptions that the summer was unusually wet, our outings seemed to experience weather which was no worse than usual. Of the 15 outdoor meetings on the syllabus, eleven were dry (and often sunny) and the rest only wet for part of the day - were we just lucky?

Various members have been actively recording a wide range of natural history for national databases with some notable fungal discoveries made by Stevie Smith and Bob McCurley (see pages 39 and 46). Others have been working at moths, butterflies, birds and dragonflies in the past year. There are some requests for help with spider and mammal recording on pages 42 and 51 this year. If the record just stays in your notebook it does not add to the pool of knowledge - please consider handing it on to the relevant organisation, if necessary through a Nats Council member.

At Camperdown Wildlife Park an old aviary was refurbished and named as a tribute to one of our former presidents, Len Fullerton, and all three of his three daughters attended from far flung parts of the UK - Sussex, Cornwall and Elgin. Indeed one of them, Leonore Goodliffe, is still a member of the Society. Anne and Jean Pollard were pleased to meet them there. Leonore kindly sent an account of the day (unbidden) which is on page 41.

The major project was the new Frances Towns Memorial Hide at Carsegowniemuir (see below) which took a lot of planning and organisation. Our thanks go, in particular, to Jim Cook for coordinating this and for site levelling and painting, and to his team of helpers at all the various stages. The Society has also purchased a remote-controlled 'trail camera', with legacy money, which is available for loan to members. It takes some trial and error to find a suitable spot to place it but can result in some good wildlife shots or videos, even in the dark as it has infra red lighting. Borrow it and see what visits your garden at night.

Last, but not least, I must extend my thanks to all who have helped me over the year to keep things running smoothly: Secretary, Lorna Ward; Treasurer, Dorothy Fyfe and Excursion Secretary, Davie Stein in particular, but also to all Council Members for a wide range of tasks. Thank you.

Anne Reid

**Stop press:** The 2012 photographic competition was won by Jon Cook with his shot of 'Heron with Pike', reproduced on page 27. A full report will appear in the 2013 Bulletin.

### CARSEGOWNIEMUIR REPORT

The past year has proved to be an especially busy one. The severe gale in January blew down a substantial chunk of the large old **rowan** in the centre of the quarry, partially uprooting and smashing part of the trunk. A few dried-up caps of **shaggy scaly-cap** (*Pholiota squarrosa*) pointed to the real culprit as several other rowans have succumbed to its ministrations in the past. Unfortunately the mass of large branches fell directly across the back path and had to be cleared. As luck would have it, though, a small relief path cut the previous year allowed passage around the fallen tree. I took a bushman's saw along on several occasions and cleared a number of branches but it was hard work and obviously would take a considerable time. Fortunately, Ronnie Young volunteered the use of his power saw and on a clear day in March we set to. It took several hours of strenuous effort on both our parts, cutting and clearing, but eventually the path was opened again, a great relief. The warm dry March weather helped considerably in making the job easier.

Another activity starting last year and extending into early March was the construction of a number of bird boxes and the refurbishment of several old boxes. Joy Cammack was very generous and donated two more and Colin McLeod donated several large solid pieces of wood which were used to build a single substantial box. Altogether, a total of 15 boxes have been put up; seven boxes with open fronts, for **blackbirds**, **robins**, **wagtails** and those species which nest in the open and eight with holes suitable for **tits**, **wrens** and similar hole-nesting birds, including three boxes for **swifts** mounted on a single board. Most were fixed in trees between 10 and 12 feet up but the swift

boxes were suspended on the south-facing cliff above pond 5. The good news is that at least one box, one of the two donated by Joy, was occupied by a family of **blue tits** and another showed signs of occupation.

March also meant the planting of several excellent **oak** trees kindly donated by Richard Brinklow. Three of these were planted, with the agreement and help of the Youngs, in the field to the south. The idea is that they will help to form an avenue that in years to come will allow wildlife to pass much more easily between Wilsteeds Wood and the quarry. Perhaps, when the trees have grown sufficiently large in the next 10 or 20 years, we may even see the occasional **red squirrel** visiting the quarry. These and other trees planted in the quarry itself were watered well by Dorothy and Margaret because of the dry weather. Peter Ellis also donated three small **ash** trees, from self-sown seedlings at Barry Mill, which were planted in March sheltered inside tall tubes. The length of the dry and warm spell in March necessitated another visit later in the month to water all the new trees. All seem to have produced a healthy crop of leaves and grown reasonably well in the summer. Unfortunately, however, several of the small trees and bushes (a small **birch** and two **junipers**) that were replanted because they were being heavily shaded have not survived the move. The others, though, seem to be doing well.

The sudden and surprising fall of snow in early April broke down a few more of the ancient and decrepit trees and bushes but fortunately none fell across a path. They'll be left to contribute to the local insect and fungi populations. However, the fierce gale in early May broke down several more of the older, already partly fallen, trees and we had to unblock the back path again but this time it was only a minor task.

The area where the hide (originally suggested by Dorothy Fyffe) was to be sited was cleared in mid-April and much earth moved to level it. A number of different local garden shed firms were investigated and, eventually, Gillies and Mackay near Errol were selected. They produced a plan and estimate that was accepted at the Council meeting in early June and, after several rounds of negotiations, constructed the hide according to our specifications. It was successfully installed in mid-July, greatly and gratefully assisted by Ronnie Young's tractor and trailer and a small party of strong volunteers from RM Condor - and a break in the rain. At the same time the annual task of clearing the paths of vegetation went on and efforts to improve the paths continued. Also, small areas around the young trees were cleared of **willowherb** and, as usual, the pulled plants used to mulch around the wire protectors.

The wet weather relented for a short time and allowed us to open the hide officially in August. Our honorary president, Gordon Corbet, kindly agreed to officiate and honoured a group of 41 naturalists and friends with a short speech and unveiling ceremony. After a short walk around the quarry, everybody made their way back to Carsegowriemuir Cottage, just as the rain started again, for the real business - the barbecue (full report on page 24. Ed.).

The hide has continued to be visited throughout the summer and autumn by small groups of members. At the beginning of October Anne and Jim applied two generous coats of green wood preservative, in between the rain showers, which didn't cover the light-brown shade, as hoped, but at least toned it down. The rain continued into October, which resulted in minor flooding late in the month but did at least mean that the soil was damp for the planting of small numbers of trees. The first batch went in near the northern boundary to help provide a screen in between the hide and the road.

In early November, when the leaves fell off the screening trees, we discovered that the hide was rather exposed to view from the road to the north. Again Anne and Jim had to apply a coat of green preservative, rather hurriedly and much thicker this time, and it made a considerable difference to the visibility of the hide. Soon after we heard the good news that the appeal by the local farmer against the rejection of his plan to construct a large turbine close to the west end of the quarry had itself been rejected. The other recent activity has been to set out the trail camera on several



occasions and record good sightings of roe deer, rabbits and foxes during both daylight hours and at night, as well as images of the two dogs. There's always something going on and wildlife to see at the quarry!

The three days of steady heavy rain just before Christmas, enlivened by regular downpours, flooded the low ground to the greatest depths ever recorded in our 26 years at the quarry. Ponds 2, 3, 4 and 5 were all connected together and even the higher ground that normally separates ponds 3 from 4 was covered over to greater than welly-boot depth. Even the path beside pond 1 was flooded and impassable. Just as well that there's a series of back paths which allowed access to the hide. Once there the difficulty was to reach the bird feeders; they were marooned out in the water. Water levels were a little reduced, although still very high, at the very end of the year.

Jim Cook

Note: See article on page 51 for a summary of Quarry hide records. Ed.

## TECHNICAL CONVENOR'S REPORT

This was another year in which the Nats took part in a range of recording and survey activities. In May there was involvement in another Ranger organised Bioblitz, this time at Riverside Nature Park on 28th May. Over 50 people turned up in sunny weather to record over 150 species. Despite managing to break two moth traps we managed to record nine species for the reserve. On the day of the Bioblitz there were even sightings of an **osprey** over the river.

This year at Barry Buddon we managed to record at two sites and while the number of species was not very great the chance to record at a different time of year (June) was well worth it. However one of the more interesting species, the **beautiful china-mark moth** was found during the walk around on the Sunday. It was photographed by Art Sangster, near Cowbyres pond. This moth is one of the very few whose caterpillar is aquatic, eating various water plants.

A number of Nats were involved at the start of the Angus small blue butterfly survey but, unfortunately, the weather was terrible. We did find that **kidney vetch**, its food plant, was abundant on the cliffs almost continuously from Arbroath to Montrose although less was found on inland sites.

Several members have also contributed records of **damselflies** and **dragonflies** for the last season of recording for the new national Atlas. Our records have filled in some blank spots on the map around Dundee and Angus.

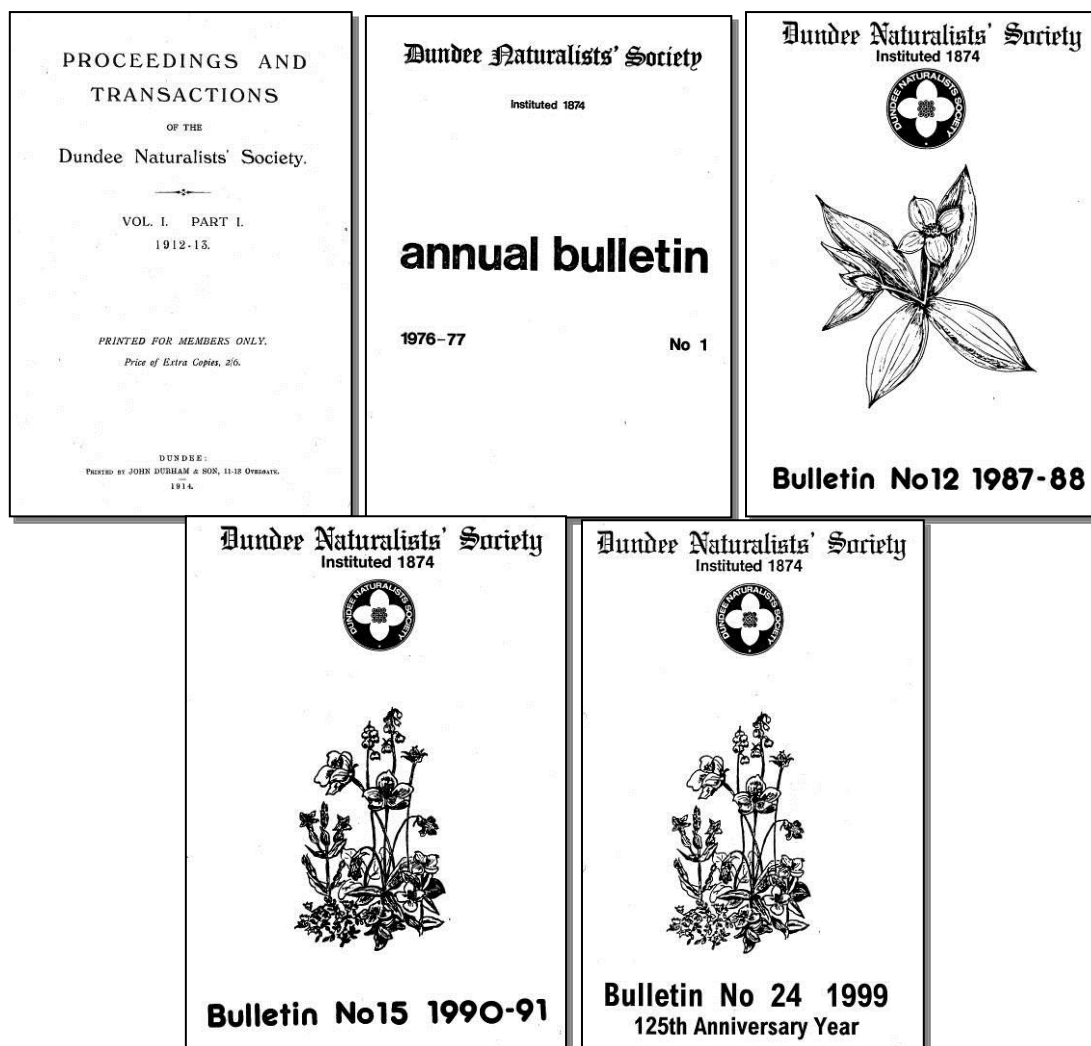
Spurred on by the sightings of **purple hairstreak** at Barry Buddon, Keith Edwards of Angus and Dundee Bird Club spent what sunny days there were looking for it in Dundee parks. He was rewarded with the discovery of the species in Balgay Park in August.

Members also attended the Tayside 'Put the Buzz into Biodiversity' conference at Battleby in December.

David Lampard

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Almost exactly 100 years ago, members of the Dundee Naturalists' Society were reading the first issue of the Society's *Proceedings and Transactions*, a glossy illustrated publication printed to a high standard. Many natural history societies, including those in Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow, had already published long runs of prestigious journals containing papers relevant to their areas, but the DNS had never previously attempted anything more ambitious than a few printed annual reports covering the business of the Society in its early years during the 1870s and 1880s. The launch could not have been more ill-timed, on the eve of the First World War. The Society somehow managed to produce a second issue in 1916 (and had hopes of another), but that was the last significant publication by the Society for more than 60 years, until our present series of *Bulletins* was launched in 1977.



Bulletin No 1 (1976-77) comprised just six duplicated and stapled A4 pages, without illustrations. The *Bulletin* kept to this format under the successive editorships of Brian Allan, Bob McLeod, Mary Galloway and Jenny Allan, though usually increasing in length by a couple of pages each year. Most of these early issues were cranked out by hand, one page at a time, on Betty McClure's old Gestetner duplicating machine. By Bulletin No 12 (1987-88), advances in photocopying technology enabled illustrations to be included, and the Society's emblem, the dwarf cornel *Cornus suecica*, made its first appearance on the front cover, initially by itself, later as part of a group of the area's alpine plants drawn by Leonore Fullerton. Bulletin No 19 (1994), the last edited by Jenny Allan before she handed over to the present (and longest-serving) editor, Anne Reid, was the first to be professionally printed, enabling the inclusion of photographs as well as line-drawings. Professional printing meant a longer lead-in time, so from that issue onwards, each Bulletin covered the previous *calendar* year. Bulletin No 29 (2004) was a novelty - due to a printer's error, an A5 version was produced! (It was later reprinted at full size, at no extra cost to us, and the miniature version handed out to people enquiring about membership - perhaps they will be a collector's item some day?) Colour photos first appeared in Bulletin No 35 (2010).

With Bulletin No 36 (2011) last year, the cumulative number of pages since 1977 passed the 1000 mark, a fascinating archive recording lectures, excursions, surveys, wildlife reports, obituaries, musings, anecdotes and even recipes. Not all our members are able to take part in the Society's meetings or outings, but we hope everyone enjoys reading about what we do in the *Bulletin*. In addition to being a record of activities, the *Bulletins* are a way of raising the profile of the Society.

Increasingly, people expect to be able to find anything and everything online. Thanks to the efforts of Google and many others, there is a real prospect that, within our lifetimes, everything that has ever been printed will be available via the internet. But while they are scanning through the contents of the world's libraries, it seems unlikely that our Bulletins will be at the top of their list of

priorities. So to help things along, more than thirty years of *Bulletins* from issue 1 (1976-77) - 32 (2007) have been scanned (more recent issues were created in fully digital format).

Each issue is now held digitally as a separate PDF file. The scanner has applied Optical Character Recognition (OCR), so they are largely text-searchable and compatible with screen-readers used by the blind and partially-sighted. The crude duplication of some of the earliest *Bulletins* was a challenge to the software, so OCR of these issues is patchy and less reliable; however, the full text can be read on-screen, and has been digitally enhanced as far as possible with the technology available to me. For good measure, I have also scanned the two issues of the old *Proceedings and Transactions* mentioned above.

The intention was that people would be able to download the scans from the DNS website [www.dundeenats.org.uk](http://www.dundeenats.org.uk). However, the electronic *Bulletins* have a combined file size of 80 MB, more than can currently be accommodated on our website at one go. It's likely that that will only be a temporary problem, and within a few years our website's current limited capacity will soon seem very puny indeed. Meanwhile, we at least hold a full digital archive, and it should be possible to make selected issues available online, while copies of the full set can be provided on CD on request.

Colin McLeod

## OBITUARIES

### JOHN COMPTON

Although not a member, John Compton, who sadly passed away in September, has been of great significance to our Society. He was a leading local conservationist, a founder member of the Angus and Dundee SWT and farmer and land owner. In 1984 he suggested to Bob McLeod and Margaret Duncan of Dundee Tree Group that the DTG might like to plant trees in and manage for wildlife an old quarry that he owned in central Angus. They visited the site and decided that the Carsegowniemuir project was more than the Tree Group could manage. The suggestion was passed on to this Society and Margaret Duncan and others began to find out more about the site. During the protracted period of surveying and investigation which we undertook, followed by detailed negotiations, John remained positive and encouraging. Indeed, it is fair to say that without his close interest and support, the Carsegowniemuir project is unlikely to have gone ahead. His attitude was in complete contrast to those of several other land owners with whom Society members had dealings. The rest, as they say, is history. Nearly 30 years later, the Nats remain active in the quarry, our own special hands-on conservation and land management project.

We were pleased to meet John occasionally on site in the early days and then again at the 21st anniversary celebration in 2007. Unfortunately, he was unable to accept our invitation to the opening of the hide this past summer as his health had broken down recently.

Jim Cook

James Lamont, husband of Ena, died on 5th February. They lived on Balgillo Road, then latterly in St Vincent Court, Broughty Ferry.

Dr Edward Kemp, the first curator of the Dundee University Botanic Garden, died in July aged 101. Though not a member, he was known to many.

## TUESDAY EVENING STUDY OUTINGS

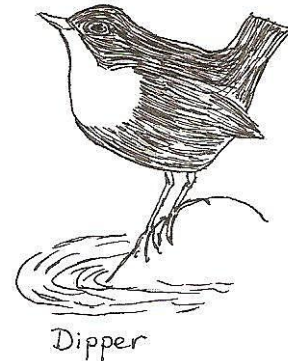
Tullybaccart - 22nd May. Gordon led a leisurely walk, on a very pleasant evening, from Tullybaccart up through the forestry to the top of the hill above Ledcreeff Loch with birds singing all around and good views in the sunshine. In a cleared area a **tree pipit** was singing on a small, remaining **rowan** - a first for many. There were **siskins** in the conifers, the **warblers** were all in good voice and we heard the distinctive calls of **yaffle** and **cuckoo**. **Stag's horn clubmoss** was found beside the main track and examined closely.

Broughty Ferry Churchyards - 9th May. The chill blustery winds, threatening rain, attracted only a few hardy naturalists but very soon the meeting took a turn for the worse. Jim announced that the main venue planned, St Aidan's Churchyard, had been blocked off, just within the last few days, by renovation work and couldn't be accessed in the evening. The work had been planned for a considerable time but access to the grounds had been promised because the work would 'only affect the building'. The other interesting churchyard, that at Fisher Street, was unfortunately not accessible in the evenings due to council staffing problems and the remaining churchyards are too heavily manicured to be of great interest.

Having exhausted plans A to D, plan E was put into effect and the small group made their way along the seashore. We spent some time looking at the **egg-wrack**, **bladder wrack** and **spiral wrack** forming dense tangles on the harbour wall and the fringe of **channel wrack** higher up with bright orange *Xanthoria parietina* and other **lichens** higher still. A few **crabs** and **sand hoppers** attracted attention further along as we moved on to near the lifeboat station. A couple of hungry **mute swans** accompanied us hopefully but when a father and two children came down armed with plentiful supplies of bread a whirling horde of screaming **gulls** suddenly appeared and a total of 14 **swans** rapidly swam in. We finished with a peek at the Fisher Street cemetery through the slats of the gate and then turned for home. There's always something to see if you keep your eyes open.

Barry Mill - 5th June. This outing produced the best turn-out of the whole summer; very near to 30 people assembled at the Mill. Some only walked the shorter loop but many went all the way up to the top weir which supplies the water for the mill lade. A wide selection of birds was seen including **dipper**, **great spotted woodpecker**, **tree sparrow** and **yellowhammer** and someone saw a **hedgehog**. Once **sweet cicely** had been pointed out, by Anne, the braver amongst the party tried tasting the soft seeds which have a distinct similarity to aniseed.

Dighty - 12th June. We walked a short section of the Dighty downstream from Drumgeith Road with a select party, led by Lorna. Everywhere was very lush after all the rain and **slugs** and **snails** were much in evidence. A **heron** was seen in the water and **blackcap**, **willow warbler** and **sedge warbler** were all singing their territorial songs. A **reed bunting** was also spotted nearby, but the list was otherwise short. Some mosaic benches, created as a community project, were admired along the path.



Jim Cook and Anne Reid

## WINTER LECTURES

### NEW YEAR OUTING

2nd January

Fortified by cakes and mulled wine, kindly provided by Jenny Allan, 25 members set off up the Dighty from Monifieth High School car park. The A party followed the left bank of the river up to the second bridge before looping back. The B party crossed the tree top walk (Seven Arches) and descended the steps to the river. B+ members diverted onto a small muddy path that followed a bend of the Dighty. They were rewarded with **mallard** on the water and a pair of **dippers** one of which flew off upstream while the other was obligingly feeding. There was a clear **roe deer** slot and **hazel catkins** in full flower. Among birds seen by members of the A party were **long-tailed tits**, a **heron**, **buzzard** and **goldcrests**. Anne Reid's daughter Mary pointed out trees planted as part of the Angus Millennium forest. She and her sister Christine had helped plant some of these trees when pupils at Grange School. In fact Grange, helped and encouraged by Anne, had been growing and planting trees along their boundary before 2000. It was heartening to see how well most trees were doing.

Arriving back at Anne's garden we found the BBQ had been lit by Christine and a gazebo and chairs set out for the aged and infirm. Members cooked their own food but other delicacies appeared as if by magic and Anne provided hot tea, coffee and Christmas cake. A **sparrowhawk** whizzed through the garden but was only noticed by a few. The fungi under the **Norway spruce** were

identified as **wood blewits** by Gordon Maxwell who deemed them edible, but only if cooked. One did appear on the barbecue, but was not actually eaten. Entertainment was in the form of hunting for wild (toy) animals hidden around the garden. Competition was keen - there was a prize.

What a great start to 2012. Thank you very much Anne and your helpers.

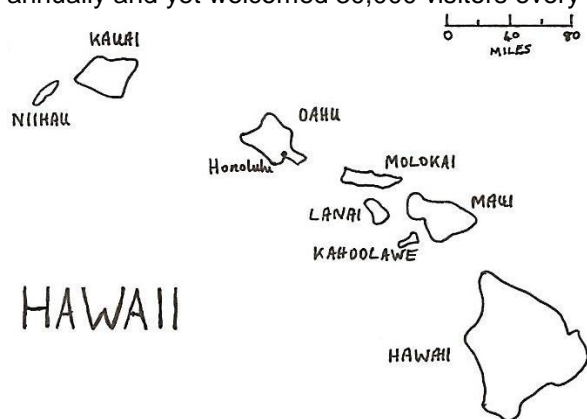
Margaret Bainbridge

## BACK FROM THE BRINK

Plant Conservation in Hawaii

Clare Reaney - 11th January

The Nats were treated to a first-class and enticing presentation as our first winter lecture of the New Year. Clare delivered a concise and fascinating description of her botanical visit to the island of Oahu and two of its neighbours. She began with a little basic geography, the isolation of the islands in the middle of the vast expanse of the Pacific, their relations to each other in the island chain and their main climatic features. Her clear and confident voice delivered statistics on the population: more than 800,000 plus 120,000 members of the US military and a throng of about 70,000 visitors every year - in other words, especially on Oahu, the most populous island, cramped! The University of Hawaii Botanic Gardens and Lyon Arboretum, with an area of 200 acres (maintained by only seven gardeners) and only 30 minutes from Waikiki, were drenched with some 165 inches of rainfall annually and yet welcomed 30,000 visitors every year.



A most interesting diversion was on the origins of this most remote flora. How, on earth (quite literally!), did the plants get there? It seems that only 2% were likely to have been borne in by the wind (not surprisingly), some 23% were carried in by water (sounds likely) but most, a whopping 75%, seem to have been carried in or on birds (fairly obvious, when you think about it). Of the original vegetation, about 90% is endemic (found nowhere else) and of this as much as 50% is threatened with extinction. The principal threats include habitat destruction, as usual, and a variety of introduced animals and competing plants. Included amongst this throng are large **acacia** trees and **sandalwood** trees, thickets of

**strawberry guava**, **Kahili ginger** and the dreaded *Grevillea robusta*. Introduced animals include destructive **pigs** and even more destructive **rats**, **mongoose**s to hunt the **rats** (they didn't!) and, perhaps worst of all, **mosquitoes**.

Native species under threat are, most notably, **nene** (pronounced neh-neh) **geese**. They were almost extinct before a few, famously, were captured by Peter Scott, reared in numbers at Slimbridge (headquarters of the Wetland and Wildfowl Trust) and reintroduced. Threatened plants include **akeke**, **apapane** and *Cyanea leptostegia* trees, and **ohani**, which Clare saw being planted out in the arboretum. There was also a great diversity of *Lobelia* species. On a trip to the upper slopes of the crater on Maui, she admired superbly named **silversword** plants and **ahinahina** specimens and others including wonderful **tree ferns**.

On an expedition to another island, Kauai, Clare admired the spectacularly eroded Waimia canyon and saw specimens of the native **hibiscus**. Along the Alaki plateau, a very wet, heathy and boggy swamp, the path was forced to follow boardwalk trails through the vegetation. The most dramatic of all, though, was the Na Pah coastal walk with wonderful views over the sea. Around about were *Pandanus tectoris*, **screw-pine trees**, and in a spectacular finale, steep almost sheer cliffs harbouring specimens of another endemic member of the *Lobelia* group, called **olulu**, *Brighamia insignis*. It was good to know that it is still, quite literally, clinging on! It had been a most fascinating and informative way to begin the winter programme and the speaker was sincerely thanked by a generous round of applause.

Jim Cook



## MEMBERS' NIGHT

24th January

The evening was in two parts. We started with the results of the photographic competition before moving on to members' slides.

### Photographic Competition 2011

The subject for the competition for 2011 was 'Scottish Wildlife' and this attracted 10 entries from members. In order of receipt, these were:

Davie Stein: A Pheasant Outlook  
Bob McCurley: Damsel NOT in Distress  
Colin Reid: Fallen Angel  
Anne Reid: Kintyre Predator  
Jim Smith: Diving Gannet  
Stevie Smith: Red Deer Stag  
Dorothy Fyffe: Wigeon  
Alban Houghton: Wild West Goats  
Jon Cook: Woodcock in Glen Esk  
Jim Cook: Clustered Bellflower

The competition was judged by local photographer Eric McCabe and Lorna Ward, from the Nats Council, and all administration was done by Brian Allan. These three must all be thanked for contributing to the success of this first year of the competition.

The winner was Jon Cook, with his stunning woodcock photograph, and he was presented with the Kim Eberst Memorial Trophy and a certificate by Alastair Eberst. Second and third places were Bob McCurley and Stevie Smith, respectively, who were both presented with certificates.

The trophy was made specially by Davie Stein and it is illustrated in the 2011 Bulletin (p. 22) alongside the winning entry.

### Members' Slides

We then moved on to the wide variety of photographs submitted for the evening's entertainment, again organised into a single presentation by Brian Allan.

Brian Allan 'Primula to Pancratium' The difficulties of photographing *Primula palinuri* in Italy, **tulips** in Crete, a selection of wonderful **orchids**, a startlingly blue **alpine columbine** and *Pancratium maritimum* on a beach in Menorca - nearby people unaware of the gem at the back of the beach.

Alban Houghton 'Seaside to Hillside' **Dolphins** off Broughty Ferry and a swirl of assorted **gulls** cashing in on a shoal of small fish all taken from a boat on a trip to the Bell Rock. The Nats trip to the Cairnwell and the beautiful (and rare) **Alpine milk vetch**, *Astragalus alpinus*, seen there. **Chamois** in Abruzzo in Italy, **mountain hares** on Dreish and a **slow worm** up Tarfside which escaped by swimming.



Brian Ballinger '2011 Highlights' Gale damage in Brownie Wood though there was none in Garrick wood, up north. An overgrown, but flowery, path at Dam Pond with a request for more visitors to trample it. Photos of *Baldellia ranunculoides*, **Norwegian mugwort** and **holly fern** from BSBI surveys undertaken. Nats with umbrellas up on the Inchcolm outing, despite no rain - they were a defence against attacking **lesser black-backed gulls**.

Stevie Smith 'Birds, Bugs and Beasts' A wonderful selection of high quality, close-up shots of insects including a **forky tailie**, a **Norwegian wasp** and **orange tip butterflies**. A **pipistrelle bat** on the house wall, in daylight, a **shrew** and a large **hedgehog** followed by a close-up of a pair of courting **slugs** unlike anything seen before.

Jim Smith 'A Miscellany' Some Dorset species which are not usually seen in Scotland, including **beautiful demoiselle**, **banded demoiselle** and a **brimstone butterfly**. Nearer to home a pair of mating **common blue butterflies** at Barry Buddon, some wonderful spiky **puffballs** and a **whitethroat** photographed through the window at home. All were envious of the **otter**, taken at Applecross, which appeared six days out of the seven they stayed there.

Davie Stein 'Birds, Bugs and Nats' Portraits of a **robin**, **white-fronted geese**, **lesser black-backed gulls** and **blackbirds** interspersed with groups of Nats, **tadpoles**, **fungi** and a **leaf beetle**.

Bob McCurley 'Not a Bird in Sight' Plants on an SWT outing in Corrie Fee including **yellow oxytropis**, **starry saxifrage** and **yellow pimpernel** and some **house martin nests** (only!) on the cliffs there. **Black darter dragonfly** and **emerald damselfly** from Barry Buddon and some portraits of local **snails**.

Peter Ellis 'Succulent Hunting in Grand Canaria' Rugged, mountainous inland scenery and unfamiliar plants including the introduced **prickly pear**, *Opuntia* sp, several members of the *Euphorbia* genus with eye-catching growth forms and the **giant houseleek**, *Aeonium canariense*. Also a **lizard**, a **red rock crab** and a recent introduction to the Canaries, a **collared dove**.

Anne Reid 'Surprises and Nats' The surprises ranged from a **great white egret** at the Lurgies, Montrose, via June **hailstones** (from the previous day) lying like snow in Backmuir Wood to a day-flying **bat** near Monikie. Nats were shown moth trapping and as a group, shot at the Montrose Basin spring walk.

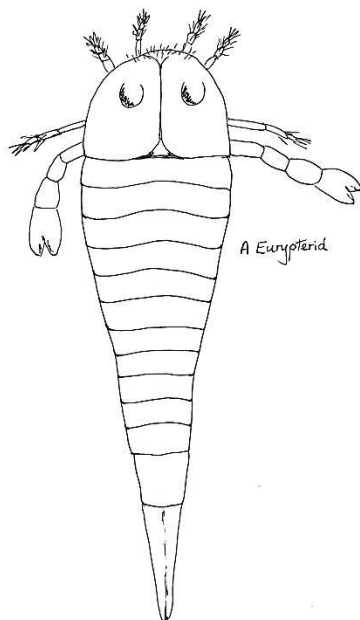
This was an evening packed with excellent photographs and happy memories of outings and events. Brian was warmly thanked for putting the presentation together and running the evening so smoothly.

Anne Reid

## BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTS IN ANGUS 410 MILLION YEARS AGO

Nigel Trewin - 7th February

In this fascinating lecture, we visited the area round our own nature reserve at Carsegowniemuir Quarry, seeing the landscape and its organisms as they were in Early Devonian times. It was a tectonically-active period; a major volcano had recently appeared near what is now Montrose, vesicles in its lava since filled to form agates. Farther away, earthquakes uplifted the land and more volcanoes erupted, the basal lavas of which survive as the Sidlaw and Ochil Hills. A vast river flowing south-westwards found its route to the sea blocked by these new uplands, and the water backed up to form 'Lake Forfar', covering much of the Strathmore area. Huge quantities of sand and mud eroded from mountains to the north were deposited in this lake, forming the Lower Old Red Sandstone which became the basis of the quarrying industry around Turin Hill.



Aquatic life included at least eight genera of jawless fish, bottom-feeding **cephalaspids** armoured with large head-shields, together with **acanthodians**, spiny shark-like predators that were probably the ancestors of modern sharks; and *Pterygotus anglicus*, a massive **eurypterid** or lobster-like predator, which grew to more than 1.5 metres long, and was probably the largest animal of the period. A smaller eurypterid, *Pagea sturrocki*, has a special connection to the Nats - it is known from only a single specimen presented by the Society to the Royal Scottish Museum, and is named after Edwin D Sturrock, who served variously as Secretary, Treasurer and President of the Society between the 1930s and 1970s. There must have been other creatures lower down the food-chain, more delicate soft-bodied organisms whose remains have not survived; and it can be surmised that even amongst more robust groups, there were many more species that have not been found - some of the 'known unknowns' of palaeontology. Evidence of predation of smaller fish by larger ones, and their evolutionary attempts to avoid being eaten, exists in the form of fish spines found in coprolites, fossilised droppings.

Around the shores of Lake Forfar, on sandbanks exposed during times of low water and where the river deposited material in its delta, land organisms became established. There were knee-high mini-forests of the sporophytic plants *Zosterophyllum* and *Cooksonia*, along with the flat thalli of *Parka*, and the enigmatic nematophytes, which were possibly large fungi. Often only fragments of the stems of these species were fossilised, after being carried away by floods; but a much more intact

fossil of an early terrestrial millipede *Archidesmus* which met the same fate has been found - it was very similar to modern millipedes. Trace fossils also exist, for example the tracks of *something* with at least eight pairs of legs, and signs of bioturbation of fine sediments on the lake floor.

At Carsegowriemuir we generally only find small fragmentary fossil remains, perhaps pieces of drifting plant stems or isolated fish scales, but the nearby Tillywhandland Quarry has produced a rich fish-bed in seasonally-deposited sediments accumulated over 2000 years. Recent research has proved that this was the main source of Victorian specimens labelled 'Turin Hill' in museum collections. The best-preserved fossils are generally contained in limestone carbonate nodules within the sandstone, and modern acid-preparation techniques mean there have been more discoveries recently than at any time since our Victorian forebears paid the quarry-workers to set aside interesting-looking stones. (One of these early collectors was James Powrie of Reswallie (1815–1895), who presented an important collection of fossil fish to the Dundee Naturalists' Society.)

However, even the best local specimens have been compressed by immense pressure. So our 'virtual tour' took us northwards to Aberdeenshire, with a brief stop at Stonehaven where the rather older mid-Silurian (425 mya) fish bed at Cowie Harbour (visited during our excursion in May 2011) has also produced early eurypterids, and a millipede that is the earliest known land animal, explained in an interpretive panel. The final destination was the Rhynie chert, dating from 407 mya, so a slightly younger Early Devonian rock than our Angus sandstones. The chert is actually a sinter, layers of silica deposited by hot springs or geysers similar to those still active in Yellowstone and Rotorua. Numerous freshwater and terrestrial species have been found in this rock; the method of deposition means that plant stems were engulfed in an upright position, and the fossils are uncompressed and are extremely well-preserved - they need to be studied using thin-section microscopy, but 3-D imaging is possible. One of the plants, *Asteroxylon*, was similar to modern **clubmosses**, and the earliest known **stonewort**, *Palaeonitella cranii*, has been found here, along with **fungi**. The chert also preserves a remarkable primitive arthropod fauna, including **springtails**, **mites**, **myriapods**, spider-like **trigonotarbid**s, and mysterious **euthycarcinoids**, a now-extinct group.

The illustrations used in the lecture were largely taken from Professor Trewin's book *Fossils Alive! or new walks in an old field*, his stock of which sold out at the end of the meeting. Other familiar locations given the same imaginative 'wildlife safari' treatment in its chapters include Dura Den and Bishop Hill.

Colin McLeod

## VISIBLE MIGRATION

Dr Clive McKay - 21st February

Dr Clive McKay treated us to an expert and enthusiastic talk on his involvement in the observation of birds on visible migration within the UK. His earliest activities were in the Pennine hills above Sheffield but, after going to Aberdeen University and then settling in Angus with his family, his involvement moved north of the border.

He described the observation of 'Vis Mig' in terms of sea-watching from coastal cliffs and headlands as well as on land near the coast, and inland where the topography and suitable habitats 'funnelled' the movement of birds on migration. He also stressed the importance of being able to recognise the calls of different species, suitable weather conditions and the use of jizz (possibly derived from GISS - General Indication of Size and Shape) as the birds approached the observer. The analogy with the running styles of Liz McColgan and Paula Radcliffe when viewed in the distance was most enlightening!

He then gave us a tour of his main Vis Mig sites in Angus with the best coastal location being at Easthaven, just north of Carnoustie, and an inland site at Barry Hill, near Lintrathen, on the highland boundary fault line.

Clive's observations have involved a wide range of species and numbers, from a **pelican** over Barry Hill to hundreds of thousands of **siskin** passing down the coast at Easthaven. The sequence of species migrating was also highlighted with **white wagtails** on the coast in early September and **pieb wagtails** in late September.

The importance of a national network of observers (contributing their observations to Vismig.org) was illustrated by showing *Motacilla alba* **wagtail** movements being tracked through the

UK. These birds move down the east coast of Scotland then follow the east side of the Pennines into Cornwall before leaving the UK.

Clive was keen to point out that Vis Mig observations can be made throughout the year with **whooper swans** departing in March, **pink-footed geese** moving north in April through to the east coast emigrations in late August and September involving a range of passerines and raptors followed by the arrival of winter visitors from late September onwards.

The importance of recording Vis Mig, and bird observations in general, was illustrated by how members could use Bird Track, an online facility run by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) in conjunction with the SOC (Scottish Ornithologists' Club) and Birdwatch Ireland. The benefits to County Bird Recorders was emphasised with the example that in 2011, Jon Cook, the Recorder for Angus, was able to access 15,818 collated records of 214 species from 636 sites in Angus for use in the Dundee and Angus Bird Report. Clive ended his talk by showing how each contributor to Bird Track has their own database which they can explore in the form of graphs, maps and tables and that he hoped some members would log on next morning to register and contribute their records.

Bruce Lynch

## SOCIAL EVENING

24th February

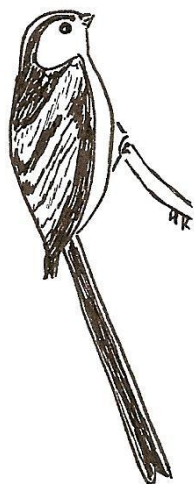
Following its success in 2011, the Social Evening was held for a second year at the Station Hotel, Carnoustie. Thirty one members attended. Dorothy Fyffe contributed two light hearted puzzles, one of Dingbats and the other based on birds. Anne Reid produced a more erudite quiz using Latin names. Competition for the prizes was cut throat and perhaps a degree of gamesmanship came into play. As we remembered, the choice of menu, food and service were all praise-worthy. The raffle prizes were so numerous that almost everybody won something. It was a thoroughly convivial evening and those of us who fell into the trap are unlikely to forget that *Puffinus puffinus* is a **Manx shearwater** while *Fratercula arctica* is the **puffin**.

Margaret Bainbridge

## SPRING WALK AT TAYPORT

3rd March

Despite the weather being less than favourable, the walk was well attended by 22 Naturalists. The route was a straight out and back through a pleasant tree and shrub lined trail based on a disused railway. Sightings got off to a good start with distinctive male **elder ducks** in their breeding plumage just off the harbour and a look through the binoculars showed the more muted females in the raft beside them.



The group was able to set off in the dry although the weather remained unsettled throughout the walk. This spring outing gave everyone the chance to renew acquaintances and many took the opportunity to discuss bird visitors to their gardens over the mild winter while they walked. As well as bird sightings along the trail, there were several fungi apparent including the rather attractive **coral spot**, the creepily named **dead man's fingers** and several **elder trees** festooned with **jelly ears** which had recently been refreshed by the rain.

Nats member Betty Gallacher shared her memories of this area which she visited as a child when her uncle was a lighthouse keeper, working alternate weeks between the High Light and 'The Pile' - the structure to mark a rock protruding some way off shore.

A flock of **geese** passed overhead but were flying too high to be positively identified. Assorted **finches** and **tits** including **chaffinch** and **greenfinch** flitted throughout the bushes, some of them only identified by their tuneful singing. A song like the tinkling of tiny bells helped to locate a flock of delightful **long-tailed tits**. The scarce **tree sparrow** was still in evidence along with **dunnock** and several **robins** claiming their territories. A lone **grey heron**

was spotted stalking its prey down on the shoreline. Unfortunately the tide was too far in to enable wading birds to feed on the shore, however a single **curlew** - Europe's largest wading bird - was sighted in the field, resting with its head and considerable bill tucked under a wing, and another was heard making its distinctive bubbling call.

Those who made it to the trail end, despite the drizzle commencing, were rewarded with a **song thrush** singing sweetly in one of the trees. However, all too soon it was time to retrace our steps and head for the welcoming warmth of the Tavern and the promise of a tasty lunch, with a last minute showing of a twittering flock of **goldfinches** just minutes from the end.

Bird sightings totalled 27 species altogether - a good result for this spring outing.

Stevie Smith



## SUMMER OUTINGS

### EXCURSION TO THE REFURBISHED CHAMBERS STREET MUSEUM, EDINBURGH

28th April

Marjorie Tennant and Pat Gaff were the first Nats to arrive at the Museum and were comfortably seated while the rest of the party gathered. They didn't have long to wait. Margaret and Peter Bainbridge were followed into the undercroft reception area by Davie Stein and several others. Unfortunately the appointed leader, David Lampard, had been forced to withdraw at short notice and Jim Cook was asked to take over. At the same time Anne Reid, our President, was attending an event in Camperdown Park, representing the Nats (see page 41).

Meanwhile, at the Museum, ten members had gathered by 11 o'clock in the new entrance space and soon made their way up to the large clock on the ground floor. We were fortunate enough to join one of the 'taster tours'. Our guide, a volunteer, was very good although he had rather a soft voice. He quickly led the party up to the top floor where we were able to look down over the displays. At the same time the tour group avoided the crowds on the ground floor and were given a good introduction to the variety of displays. The tour finished shortly after noon and most of us decided that it was time for lunch.

As usual the Nats party spread out but agreed to re-form near the clock at 1.00 pm. Some members excused themselves from the museum, having more pressing engagements elsewhere, but most settled down in one of the snack bars and a small group took advantage of the superb day to enjoy the sun and the view from the roof garden. We met up again at the agreed time and made our way through the main wildlife display gallery on the ground floor, exploring and examining the specimens. The displays were tremendous, with a number of large and spectacular specimens in naturalistic poses while displays of smaller mounted animals with explanatory information were arranged around the sides in glass-fronted cases. Above us, the suspended **sharks** and other fish, **dolphins** and similar aquatic specimens almost gave you the impression, as Brian Ballinger remarked, of "being at the bottom of a giant aquarium". However, the electronic information display panels were difficult to get near because of the numbers seeking information. Although the new displays are impressive and interesting, an overall linking 'theme' is not immediately obvious. The series of displays seem more to be selected and well spread out for the interest of younger visitors. It remains to be seen, though, once the initial furore of the new museum settles down, whether it will be worthwhile for adults to continue to visit the museum to take in new information about subjects of interest in local or Scottish wildlife, environment, geology, fossils and similar topics. The old-fashioned displays held so much of this type of information that they were worth visiting time after time and it was often possible to find the answer to some question of the moment. Perhaps the idea is that the use of the internet will replace this function.

Most of the party had made their way into the geology gallery by mid-afternoon and took in the filmed display of geological processes in action. Others spent some time over the continental drift model, discussing the break-up of Pangaea to Laurasia and Gondwanaland, with fossil and mineral



evidence to back up the recreated land-masses. Once again, though, the numbers of specimens on display were much reduced and the explanatory notes with them have been largely omitted.

In the late afternoon a couple of members made a short visit to the Botanic Gardens. Its rhododendron and rock garden displays provided a further reward, with the first hearing this spring of a **chiffchaff**. It had been a most interesting first excursion.

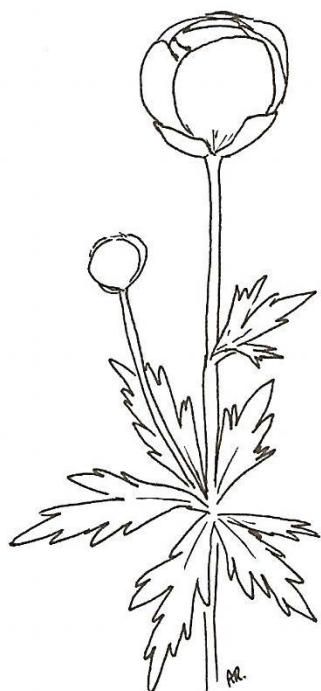
Jim Cook

## BALKELLO WOOD AND AUCHTERHOUSE HILL

Wednesday 9th May

The weather previous to this outing had left much to be desired, but the sun, once again, shone on the Nats as we met at the Balkello car park for our circular Sidlaws walk. Around 20 hardy souls turned up at the appointed hour for the walk which was to combine woodland and moorland.

It was not long before items of interest began to turn up. The odd **buzzard** or two showed up and the distinctive call of the **raven** was heard, soon to be seen overhead watching us carefully - it was still the nesting season. A good display of **early purple orchids** (about 40 flowering spikes) was seen on south-facing exposures above Balkello. Butterflies were rather scarce, but the odd **peacock** and **small tortoiseshell** turned up, plus the ubiquitous **green-veined white**. Anne Reid looked in vain for a **green hairstreak** which she had not ever seen - never in the right place at the right time. We resigned ourselves to the fact that May is not the best month for butterflies in Scotland, and the Sidlaws is a large area to cover in one day.



Globe flower

Other sightings were coming in including **primrose** and **cowslip** - the latter by no means common in the Sidlaws. Someone also found a couple of plants of **globe flower** in a marshy area over the back of the hill. It had only just reached flowering and was rather pale and not at all obvious. **Roe deer** were spotted by a number of members and at least seven were seen. By now we had reached the rear side of the hill and the southern Grampians could be observed across the open moorland. It was hereabouts that Liz Olejnik spotted a **common lizard** as it dived for cover. Though widespread in the area, they are not the easiest of creatures to spot as they blend in with the undergrowth. A quick glance as they disappear from a sunny path into the **heather** is normal.

Heading back to the car park, **wood anemones** were common among the heather. Jim Cook remembered a site for **bog cranberry** and he, justifying the use of his favourite wellies, and Anne (similarly shod) searched for, and found, it amongst the bog vegetation. It is a very small plant and took some finding.

The walk was nearing its end now and, just before we came off the hill and back into the woodland, Anne and Gordon spotted two butterflies in flight over the heather. Anne's cry of delight was a fitting finale to the day - her long-sought **green hairstreak** butterflies.

Gordon Maxwell

## LUNAN BAY

15th May

This evening outing was blessed by calm, bright conditions, though it got quite cold by the time we eventually went home. Brian and Jenny greeted us at the car park with some very welcome mulled wine which was much appreciated by all. We would have walked down the beach to their 'hut' if the tide had been right, but the Lunan Water is much too deep to cross on a rising tide, even with wellies!

Instead, we explored the shore down as far as the burn and then returned via the dunes and salt marsh. No treasures were found on the strand line but, round the corner, the course of the burn mouth was seen to have altered somewhat since our last visit. The small bump, covered in salt marsh and dune vegetation was actually surrounded by water and only accessible to the suitably clad. Near the burn there was a good display of **meadow saxifrage** (*Saxifraga granulata*) which was much photographed. There was plenty to see on the dunes, though it did help to be able to identify plants before the flowers were out. **Bulbous buttercup**, with its reflexed sepals, and **purple milk vetch** were just out, and those on hands and knees found the tiny **spring vetch** (*Vicia lathyroides*) in flower. There were signs of **rabbits** on the dune and **goldcrests** and **chaffinches** were seen in the clump of pine trees.

On the way back along the beach Jenny found a large **agate** which she presented to an excited grandson, Mark. Just as most people got back to the car park a cry went up of "**dolphins**". Several people hurried back up the slope to the viewing platform and were rewarded by the sight of two or three of the creatures gently cruising about in the bay not too far from shore. A perfect ending to a very pleasant evening walk.

Anne Reid

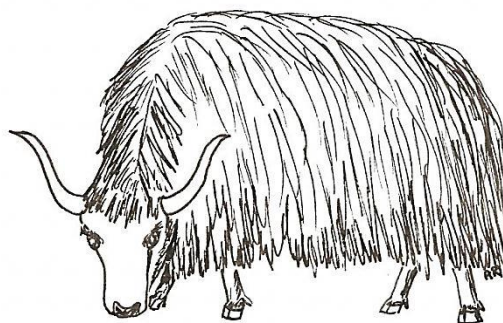
## FORT WILLIAM WEEKEND

Friday 18th May - Monday 21st May

Thirty seven Naturalists left Dundee from Sensation on time at 9.30am. The change of departure point had come about owing to the continued uncertain routes and availability of coach parking in the area. As some of our group had already been travelling for some time, we made a welcome refreshment stop at Dobbies in Perth.

Our next stop was at the Highland Wildlife Centre, Kincaig, run by the Scottish Zoological Society. The park is divided into moorland, tundra, wetland and woodland habitats and specialises in animals from cold climates. Jasper, the Education Officer, came on board our coach for a guided tour. Shortly before our visit, the park had taken into its care, from Hanover Zoo, Arktos a young male **polar bear** to share with Walker another young male acquired from Rhennen Zoo in the Netherlands, and it was good to observe that the pair had obviously bonded well and were enjoying each other's company.

**Przewalski's wild horses** were pointed out and we learned that they are the only remaining truly wild horse, but are now believed to be extinct in the wild. **European elk** and **bison** roamed freely as did various **camels**, **yaks**, **musk ox**, **moose** and **markhor**, with their fascinating twisted horns. Then there were the more delicate looking types, such as **vicuna**. The different species were prudently separated, where necessary, by unobtrusive fencing and cattle grids. **Lapwings** were in abundance, obviously enjoying being able to take full advantage of such an ideal breeding location.



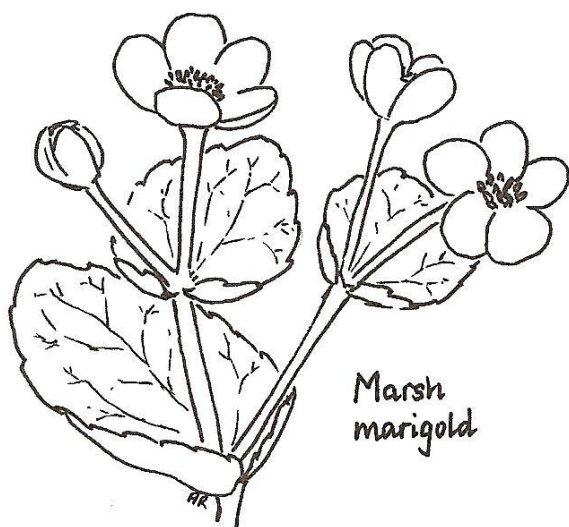
Jasper had brought on board a wide selection of furs and horns as well as two hard hats used as playthings by the **Amur tigers** and **polar bears**. The hats had all but been destroyed by deep scores and puncture marks demonstrating, in a chilling way, the power of these animals. We were told about the various breeding programmes in place and, as with all zoo-bred animals, there is an extensive DNA database throughout the world which ensures the best pairings.

We were then free to explore the rest of the park on foot. Some chose to head for the **wolf** wood where excellent walkways and viewing galleries afforded good vantage points. Those choosing to have lunch in the restaurant were entertained by the large group of **Japanese macaques** (or **snow monkeys**) whose enclosure abutted the outside seating area.

A wooded area housed a range of Scottish native species such as **capercaillie**, **Scottish wildcat**, **pine martin** and **red squirrel**. Those feeling energetic walked the distance to see the **Amur tigers**, **snowy owls**, and **arctic fox**.

We arrived at our hotel on time at 6.00pm giving time to settle before dinner at 7.30pm. As the hotel was 2 miles outside Fort William on a busy main road, there were no organised evening walks but there were opportunities for exploring the Loch shore where the **bluebells** were at their best. For those wishing a challenge, quizzes were available providing opportunities for fun get-togethers in the lounge.

Saturday dawned a beautiful sunny day. Our first visit was to Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve, where the ranger and his staff provided refreshments and gave us a talk about the reserve. Creag Meagaidh, translates as The Bogland Rock. The importance of the 'Rock' was recognised in 1964, when the upland area was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its significance as part of the Dalradian Supergroup of rocks. Later, a vegetation survey revealed the botanical richness of the area, and the SSSI was extended in 1983 to cover 6,984 hectares. The reserve represents the core 3,940 hectares of that area. It is important for the plants and animals of the cliffs, corries and windswept tops, and for the wonderful **birch** woodland on the lower slopes - and for the transitions between them.



Our party took the opportunity to divide into groups with one party taking a guided walk around the lower ancient **birch** forest where they were able to spot a variety of common woodland birds and also a **cuckoo**. Others went on the longer, higher route to a viewpoint and some went even higher towards the corrie. **Celandines** and **marsh marigolds** were still in flower at this height and such plants as **pignut** and **butterwort** were still in bud but some interesting red **lichen** was seen and also **stag's horn clubmoss**.

We then moved on to Aonach Mor which, with access to an SSSI, is a good example of an upland bog area. Using the gondolas to transport us up the 650m to the slopes of the mountain we then had a choice of two mountain trails, both offering spectacular views of the glaciated scenery and a superb view of Ben Nevis. Both **daisy** and

**dandelion** were seen in flower and **alpine lady's mantle** was widespread. Few birds were around with definite sightings of only **wheatear**, **hoodie crow** and **meadow pipit** and a possible **snow bunting**. Many people walked both paths while some patronised the cafe. One of the more memorable sights was the empty space where an information board should have been - it had blown away in winter gales and was awaiting replacement. The weather was exceptional and gave us an opportunity to see far into the distance to the Inner Hebrides.

Our destination for the first part of Sunday was to the Glenfinnan Visitor Centre with various options offered, the first being to be dropped off at Callop for a 3km woodland walk together with a couple of worthwhile opportunities of a short climb to some very fine viewpoints over Loch Shiel. Others chose to go directly to the monument and to explore the foreshore of Loch Shiel and/or to undertake another short walk from the centre to view the viaduct, of Harry Potter fame. David saw a probable **golden eagle** soaring above the viaduct but it retreated when faced with two hang gliders. A **gadwall** was seen on the loch. For those feeling energetic there was a short, sharp but very do-able climb (Lorna and Marjorie did it in 10 minutes on the recce when the conditions underfoot were icy) at the back of the centre to a very fine viewpoint overlooking loch, monument and viaduct. It was a fine day and so it was well done to all those managing to complete everything. On the way some people spotted **newts**, a variety of woodland birds and several species of **damsel** and **dragonflies**.

Our return journey to the hotel was via Banavie and Neptune's Staircase which, whilst not being particularly rich in natural history, was a good contrast and chance to see such a fine example of Thomas Telford's engineering skills. Snow covered Ben Nevis with the sun on it was magnificent and the final reward came when two vessels arrived to a most interested audience of onlookers and a good chance for us to chat with the boat owners as they bided their time awaiting their manoeuvring of the lock gates.

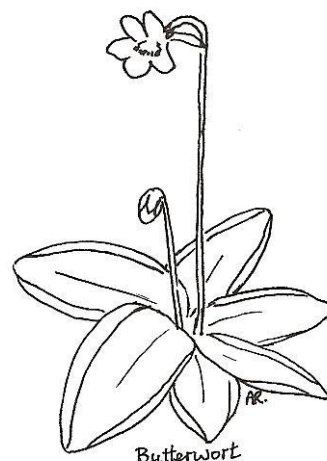
The day ended at a Coffee Shop in Fort William for those in need of refreshment after a long day but, not forgetting those intrepid naturalists, there was a stretch of river bank with a woodland path less than half a mile from where the coach was parked. Jim undertook a brief visit to nearby Inverlochry Castle.



Despite several of our party still being unwell it was decided to continue with the planned programme on Monday, and so our return journey home was via Glencoe, with a guided ranger walk at the Visitor Centre for those who felt up to it. Ranger Dan Watson led the party up the (steep) slope of Meall Mor directly behind the Visitor Centre which is mostly **limestone** and has a very interesting flora. In addition to **primrose**, **lousewort**, **milkwort** and **butterwort** there was **viviparous fescue**, with its mini-plants instead of seeds, **early purple orchid** and **moss campion**. Many of these were photographed from precarious positions on the cliff-like slopes before we made our way back down the hill.

We then had a superb drive through the spectacular scenery, with brief stops at Tyndrum and in Crieff, arriving back in Dundee around 5pm.

Marjorie Gillan and Lorna Ward  
(With additional details added by Anne Reid.)



Note: It was unfortunate that many members of the party succumbed to the Norovirus on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. This may have resulted in omissions in this account of the weekend, for which we apologise. Ed.

## ARBROATH TO AUCHMITHIE

2nd June

This boat trip should have been a straightforward trip along the coast to see the birds and wildlife from a different angle but hit a snag from the very beginning. There had been a booking mix-up so the timings were altered to slightly later in the day, which meant that the tide was not ideal when we returned - of this more anon!

A good turnout enjoyed a beautifully sunny afternoon along the coast, though there were very few birds about. Jim had his plankton net with him and we managed to catch a **comb jelly** which was admired by all. Though translucent it could be seen against a dark background and the interference patterns generated by its moving cilia (hairs) helped to pinpoint it. Anne and Stevie tried to take photographs but with little success - just too difficult on a moving boat.

On our return to Arbroath the tide had fallen too much to allow us to land at the pontoon, which was silted up, so we had to disembark by the very steep ladder on the harbour wall. This was managed by all but one passenger who felt unable to attempt the climb. The eventual solution was to call the inshore lifeboat to assist. This was able to get alongside the pontoon, though only just, and safely land her.

Letters were later written to Angus Council pointing out that the lack of dredging of the harbour had led to the non-availability of the pontoon at some states of the tide and the harbour was dredged later in the summer. The Nats also sent a donation to the RNLI to thank them for their help in resolving our difficulties.

Anne Reid

## AUCHTERMUCHTY COMMON AND BROWNIE WOOD

16th June

Auchtermuchty Common is managed by the McDuff Trust who have a remit to preserve the wildflower meadow and surrounding scrub for wildlife. On arrival, the group was introduced to Polly Murray, Secretary of the Trust, who was wielding a scythe. According to Polly the land was recorded as Common Land in 1517 and since then there has been no improving agriculture. The Trust has been involved with the Common since 1975 and various methods of scrub control have been used (including scythes). At present the Flying Flock from SWT is used to help maintain the balance between scrub and meadow.

As a wildflower meadow, the site benefits from a south-facing well drained aspect with calcareous outcrops. A wetland area consists of abundant **meadowsweet** and **water avens** but unfortunately, due to the cold spring, very little was in flower. A good patch of **early purple orchids** had just gone over. The group also spotted many **violets** which are the food plant for the **small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly**, often seen here. The site is also notable for patches of **common rockrose**, once again late to flower.

A big thank you to those Naturalists who provided written botanical notes as Clare is beginning to record this site in earnest. There are now 150 plant species recorded here and these records have been passed to the Fife Biological Records Centre.

On our return, down the hill, to Auchtermuchty, the sky was turning drizzly so a few folk ended their visit in the local pub.

The afternoon was taken up with a tour of Brownie Wood, near Gauldry, which Brian Ballinger owns and looks after. This is a mature wood with a mixture of tree species, predominantly conifers, a pond and good ground flora.

It was fascinating to see the extensive **badger** sett and Dundee Nats were seen hopefully peering down the numerous burrows looking for signs of residence such as hairs or footprints. Fresh piles of soil may indicate recent activity. This late in the day only a few birds were seen, but these included **goldcrest** and a singing **blackcap**. Many thanks to Brian for leading the group through this lovely place.

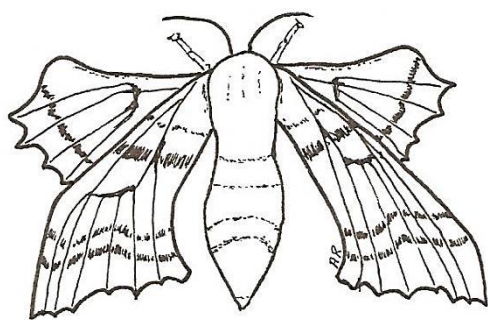
Clare Reaney

## ABERNYTE GLEBE

19th June

This evening outing was blessed by good weather - a rare commodity this month. Around 20 people gathered at the small car park beside the church and were introduced to Barry and Cathie Caudwell who live in Abernyte village and know the Glebe well. They had volunteered another local, Ian, to lead a longer walk for those who wanted to stretch their legs a bit more. The rest of us set out to explore and record as much as possible on the Glebe itself.

The site is very steep and historically was almost certainly grazed grassland. Nowadays there is a mixture of short grass (thanks to the **rabbits**), longer grass and **bramble** and **raspberry** scrub with some planted trees and a very shady **sycamore** wood at the west end. A number of nest boxes of various shapes and sizes have been installed and many were being used.



Poplar hawk moth

The contents of a moth trap, set the previous night, were on display on a convenient table and included a magnificent **poplar hawkmoth** - always a crowd-pleaser! Among the other moths were **lunar thorn**, **beautiful golden-Y** and **map-winged swift** - don't moths have wonderful names! We also found, and netted, a **gold swift** and several **silver-ground carpets** in the course of the evening.

The birds were rather shy with so many people on the site, but we did see and hear **yellowhammer**, **wren**, **goldfinch**, **willow warbler**, **whitethroat** and **blackcap**. One of the more interesting plants on the site was **Smith's pepperwort** (*Lepidium heterophyllum*) which caused some debate before being fully identified. It is a weedy species and was mostly at the edges of the paths on the Glebe. The verge of the path from the road up to the Glebe had been planted with a bumblebee seed mix, but little of it was in flower yet.

Though many explored the patch quite thoroughly, others were content to sit and enjoy the evening sunshine and birdsong. It was overall a very successful evening with all tastes catered for thanks to the forward planning of the Caudwells.

Anne Reid

## BARRY BUDDON

24th June

This annual group Open Nature Day outing to Barry Buddon proved ever popular with 65 people attending, despite a negative weather forecast. Bob welcomed the gathering followed by Assistant Commandant Captain Dave McGurk who bid us a warm welcome and mentioned the need for caution for the underfoot conditions, both after the recent heavy rainfall, and because we were on MOD training grounds.

The bird-watching group enjoyed a very healthy list of 62 species in total which included a new bird for Open Day, a **spotted flycatcher**, and in the same area a **chiffchaff** let us know he was present with his 'chiff-chaff' call. Other notable sightings were **sedge warbler**, **whitethroat**, **willow warbler**, **great spotted woodpecker**, **treecreeper**, and **cuckoo**. Raptors present featured **sparrowhawk**, **kestrel** and **buzzard**.

The botanists, too, enjoyed their day out with an exceptional sighting of literally dozens of the rare **adders tongue fern** and in addition an uncommon hybrid orchid was found and photographed by Gus and identified by our local orchid expert Brian Allan as the hybrid between **northern marsh orchid** and **early marsh orchid**.

The Lepidopterists too had a good day, in spite of a lack of sunshine, with sightings of six butterfly species which included **small pearl-bordered fritillary** and an excellent showing of the rare and threatened **small blue butterfly** which is the subject of an Angus County Survey this year. Please report any sightings of this species you may see and look out for its food plant, **kidney vetch** (*Anthyllis vulneraria*). Overnight moth trapping produced unfamiliar species due to the change of date, though overnight conditions were not conducive to a great catch - only 10 species were trapped with five more seen on the day. The most notable catch was a **fox moth** which is more frequently seen as a large, dark coloured, hairy caterpillar in the autumn. A **beautiful china-mark moth**, seen and photographed by several people, was a good record for the site as it is seldom seen and has aquatic larvae.

We all agreed that we had enjoyed another excellent day out despite the unseasonal weather, and look forward to next year when we will revert back to our usual August date to enjoy another great day out. Bob has written on behalf of the five local Natural History groups to Commandant Captain Tom Graham thanking him and his staff for their assistance in helping to make this year's Open Nature Day another successful fixture.

Bob McCurley

## BEN VRACKIE

30th June

A rather sparse bus-load of members enjoyed an excellent day on the slopes of Ben-y-Vrackie, the 'speckled mountain' (its name in Gaelic). The party divided into two groups, most going up the hill, while a total of nine walked a shorter and lower route around Moulin village.

After passing the **royal fern** growing in a garden in Moulin village and the 'Dane Stone', the ancient standing stone just above the village, the stretch of woodland along the first part of the path yielded an interesting group of flowering plants and ferns, together with several notable birds including **blackcaps**, a single **great-spotted woodpecker**, a **bullfinch** and three separate calling **chiffchaffs**. June Booker's two grandchildren seemed to find it all very interesting and clearly would have plenty to tell Mum and Dad when they arrived home, no doubt enlivened by the images captured on their cameras. On the open moorland most of the expected species were in evidence, **heathers** and **heaths**, a variety of **grasses**, **tormentil** (*Potentilla erecta*), several **speedwells** beside the path and scattered **heath milkwort** (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) with **marsh lousewort** (*Pedicularis palustris*), clumps of **deer-grass** (*Trichophorum caespitosum*) and **sweet gale** (*Myrica gale*) in damp patches. However, there was no **petty whin** (*Genista anglica*) in evidence. Flushed areas held numerous **butterworts** (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and a few **sundews** (*Drosera rotundifolia*), an occasional spike of **marsh arrow-grass**



(*Triglochin palustris*) with **bog pondweed** (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and several **sedges** in the wetter areas. We were, unfortunately, unable to find any of the planted, rare **brown bog-rush** (*Schoenus ferrugineus*). Pat Gaff identified perhaps the most interesting species which was **bristle club-rush**, (*Isolepis setacea*). Around us **meadow pipits** called and flitted about and a **kestrel** skimmed overhead while a pair of **buzzards** circled higher up.

The party stopped for a rest and a bite at Loch a' Choire, where such specimens as **bottle sedge** (*Carex rostrata*), **water horsetail** (*Equisetum fluviatile*), a **pondweed** (*Potamogeton* sp.) and a single small plant of what appeared to be **quillwort** (*Isoetes lacustris*) were noted. Anne and David were only able to net two butterflies, a **green-veined white** and a single **small pearl-bordered fritillary**, and several **common heath moths**, in the rather windy and generally cloudy, although warm, conditions. The group didn't spend long there, though, as all were keen to see the wonders further up.

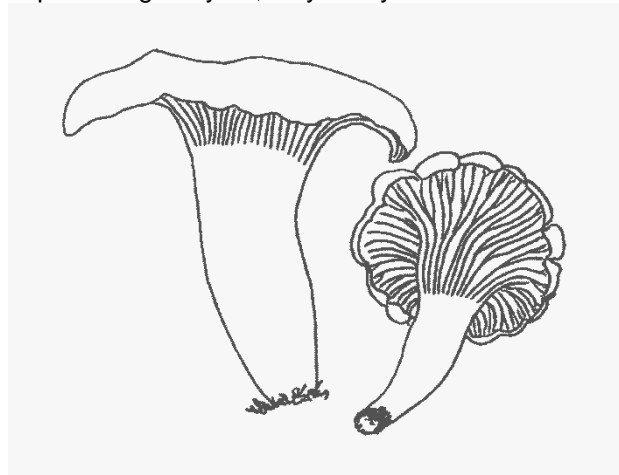
Above us three **ravens**, surely a pair with a young bird, cawed and soared along the cliff line and one or two **wheatears** flitted about the boulders. Several members reported seeing a single **ring ouzel** speeding past us. Most remained near the path and found plenty to enthuse about, including several bronzy-green **click-beetles** and a number of **dor beetles** with beautifully violet undersides. Anne pointed out many features of interest to June's granddaughter while Gordon Maxwell was the only one of us to make it to the top. The highlights, though, were the numerous clumps of **purple mountain milk-vetch** (*Oxytropis halleri*), some still in magnificent flower on the crumbling schistose cliffs and the abundant handsome **alpine vetch** (*Astragalus alpinus*), in the grass nearby (the best I've seen there). Other notable species included the unusual fern, **moonwort** (*Botrychium lunaria*), **hoary whitlowgrass** (*Draba incana*) and the shaggily-leaved **alpine mouse-ear** (*Cerastium alpinum*). It had been a great day, with just so much to find and admire.

Jim Cook

## DUNKELD HERMITAGE AND RUMBLING BRIDGE 14th July

After a short stop in Dunkeld, where **fallow deer** were spotted grazing in nearby parkland, the bus parked for the day at the National Trust car park. Possession of an NTS membership card enables free parking here - even for a bus! Twenty-five members joined this excursion.

The Hermitage is familiar territory for many Nats, but anyone who had not been there for a few years will have seen some changes. Recent severe gales have felled some large trees, and although most footpaths had been reopened following the latest damage, the route over the Hermitage Footbridge was still closed due to a landslide just south of the bridge. A more welcome change has been the renovation of Ossian's Hall with a glass screen behind the balcony to protect the structure and colourful contemporary murals by Calum Colvin on the subject of Ossian. The flow over the waterfall was exceptional for the time of year, although actually somewhat less than a week or two earlier. Our compensation for a slightly less impressive waterfall was weather that, despite being unpromising early on, stayed dry for the whole of our walk.



We were admiring the **Douglas fir** across the river downstream from the waterfall, one of the tallest trees in the UK, when we had a sighting of a **red squirrel** foraging near its base. Beyond Ossian's Hall the party straggled, and some people turned back or followed different routes along some of the many miles of paths, so that none of the subsequent sightings were seen by everyone.

Despite the wet season, we were too early for many fungi, but **chanterelle** were spotted close to the path. Some of us picked **blaeberrries**, but found they had little flavour after such a poor summer. An **osprey** was calling in flight, hidden from sight by the trees. In clearings insects were taking advantage of

the sunshine, and **ringlet** were flying in numerous places. This species tends to be more tolerant of cool and overcast conditions than many other butterflies. The most productive part of the walk for wildlife was the meadow between the woods and Rumbling Bridge. In addition to **ringlet**, we saw **meadow brown**, **small pearl-bordered fritillary**, **green-veined white**, **red admiral**, **chimney sweeper**, **yellow shell**, and at least nine species of **hoverfly**, some in large numbers. Also in this area, some members were fortunate to spot a **slow worm** and two **common lizards**, and we were all able to closely examine a dead **mole** on the path.

Picnic-places were found on the water-worn rocks upstream from Rumbling Bridge, and after lunch some of the party completed a circular walk via Tomgarrow and Inver, spotting many orchids by the roadside, hearing some very noisy young **buzzards** and a **raven** in flight, and finding a dead **common shrew** on the road in Inver.

Excellent ice cream back at the car park ended a leisurely walk.

Colin McLeod

## LOCH OF LINRATHEN AND BACKWATER RESERVOIR

28th July

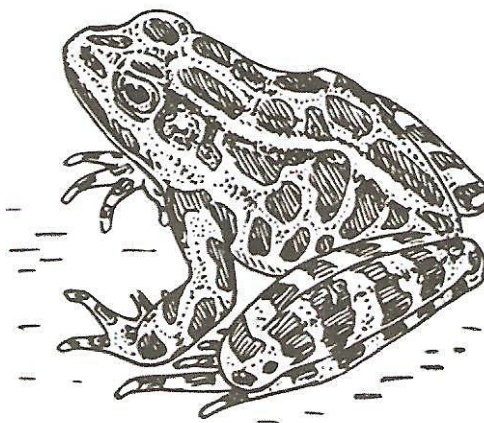
This was a bus trip to walk around part of Backwater Reservoir. There was a first stop at Peel Farm which has a café, farm shop and its own walks down to the River Isla. On the way to Backwater we passed up the east side of Linrathen Loch to look at the bird hide. However, although visibility was excellent, there was nothing to see.

On the road round the top of the Loch there was a bit of excitement with two loose bullocks in the road. With a bit of help from Nats members they were persuaded to go back into the field. Those in the front of the bus saw two **stoats** at the roadside. One was decisive enough to cross swiftly and safely but the other hesitated and retreated into the verge.

The bus safely negotiated the Backwater dam and we were duly deposited at the car park/picnic area on the north east part of the Loch near Clintlaw Corrie. Here we met up with two members of Butterfly Conservation who had seen the details of the outing posted on the east coast branch website. The original plan was to split into two parties with the low level group making their way along the loch edge while the second group stayed with them until Ley and then followed a path to Craig of Balloch. Unfortunately, heavy rainfall had waterlogged the bank-side vegetation and both groups had to stick to the road for the first part of the walk. Plentiful **ringlet butterflies** were seen along the roadside verge while a solitary **fritillary**, probably a **small pearl-bordered**, was seen just at the turn off to Craig of Balloch. Occasional **common carpet** and **shaded broad bar moths** were disturbed from vegetation.

The Craig of Balloch party followed the path to ruined farm buildings at Ley, where at least five **wheatears** were spotted along the fence line, presumably a family party. The path followed fields and gradually changed to moorland with some newly erected deer fence. Lunch was taken above a meandering stream with sightings of single **small heath** and **small tortoiseshell butterflies**. The final stretch was uneventful and led us to the summit of the path which continued towards Glen Quaharity and down to Balintore Castle.

The party retraced its steps back to the road, but then encountered the first of several prolonged, heavy downpours which dogged it all the way to the car park at the far side of the reservoir dam. The walk back turned into a footslogging trip and there were several large patches of standing water on the road. However, during breaks in the rain the sun came out and the damp road started steaming. Several **frogs** and **toads** were found alongside the road and a **roe deer** was seen retreating into the trees. Eventually, as we made our way across the dam to meet up with the other party, there was a **common sandpiper** at the water's edge, with a number of **common gulls** near the reservoir control tower. A number of members spotted a small bird of prey, possibly a **hobby** or **merlin**, and a **red squirrel** was watched working its way along a fence nearby.





Some members of the party will remember the day for getting extremely wet - it had looked like the kind of shower which would be heavy but short. By the time we realised that we were wrong it was too late to put on the over-trousers! The weather made this outing memorable for the wrong reasons, though there was good weather to begin with.

Pat Gaff compiled a list of plants found along and around the road. The following list contains some of his more notable finds (in no particular order).

*Meum athamanticum* (**spignel**), *Dactylorhiza purpurella* (**northern marsh orchid**), *Campanula rotundifolia* (**harebell**), *Crepis capillaris* (**smooth hawk's-beard**), *Galium album* (**hedge bedstraw**), *Geum rivale* (**water avens**), *Hypericum pulchrum* (**slender St. John's-wort**), *Scorzoneroides autumnalis* (**autumn hawkbit**), *Linum catharticum* (**fairy flax**), *Lotus corniculatus* (**bird's-foot trefoil**), *Myosotis scorpioides* (**water forget-me-not**), *Narthecium ossifragum* (**bog asphodel**), *Pilosella officinarum* (**mouse-ear hawkweed**), *Potentilla erecta* (**tormentil**), *Prunella vulgaris* (**selfheal**), *Ranunculus acris* (**meadow buttercup**), *Succissa pratensis* (**devil's bit scabious**), *Thymus polytrichus* (**wild thyme**), *Trifolium pratense* (**red clover**), *Veronica beccabunga* (**brooklime**), *Veronica chamaedrys* (**germander speedwell**), *Filipendula ulmaria* (**meadowsweet**), *Digitalis purpurea* (**foxglove**).

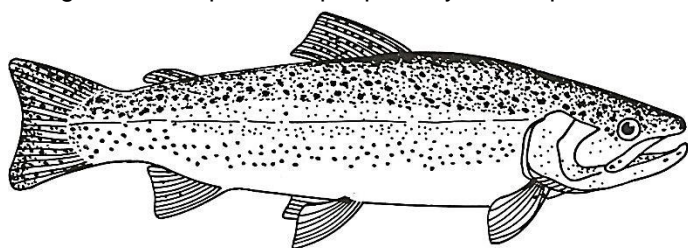
David Lampard

## LOCH LEVEN

11th August

With three drop-off points, this excursion provided a range of options, depending on ability and interests. The longest walk started at Kinross Pier and followed the Loch Leven Heritage Trail to the recently-refurbished RSPB Centre at Vane Farm (recently re-named as RSPB Loch Leven - Ed.). As the planned 'missing link' around the south-west shore is not yet completed, this was an opportunity to walk the full length of the existing path without either having to retrace one's steps all the way back, or relying on the vagaries of public transport. Eight members took this opportunity. A shorter option was to join the Trail at Loch Leven's Larder, covering just over half the length of the path. Or a third option was to stay with the bus and go directly to Vane Farm, where it was also possible to visit the Kinross Show being held next-door.

The group starting from Kinross had good views of a **roe deer** buck near Kinross Golf Course. The wildlife around the Trail is accustomed to walkers and cyclists and is relatively unfazed by being observed, provided people stay on the path. However, there are several hides for watching



birdlife on the Loch itself, and from one of these we saw a family of **mute swans**, **cormorants**, **lapwing** and **herons** roosting together on a mudbank. **Trout** were jumping for flies, and we were also able to watch them under the footbridge over the North Queich Burn. Loch Leven has its own

strain of **brown trout**, and artificial stocking with **rainbow trout** ceased some years ago. The fishery is slowly recovering as a result of 20 years of investment in improving water quality, and a trout caught in 2011 was the largest in 100 years. The ones we could see were much smaller. People had been throwing coins from the bridge for luck – the going rate seems to be 50p!

For most of its length the path is set well inland from the present-day Loch shore, so by no means all the wildlife is aquatic. In the pinewood at Burleigh Sands numerous **bat** boxes had been erected, although we could see no obvious signs of occupancy, and in the birchwoods towards Levenmouth a large and noisy flock of **long-tailed tits** was spotted. Flocks of **greylag geese** were grazing in fields east of the Loch. Summering greylag are present in Scotland in increasing numbers, due to growing breeding populations of both native origin (largely in the north-west Highlands and Islands) and naturalised stock (found almost everywhere), and over 150 pairs nest around Loch Leven, mainly on St Serf's Island.

It was a little too cool and breezy to be ideal for insect-spotting, but a few **dragonflies** were seen and **hoverflies** were feeding on many of the flowers that we passed. **Ringlets** were once again the commonest butterfly, and nice views were had of a **red admiral** during a sunny interval. The wet summer had been ideal for **slugs** and **snails**, which were much in evidence along the route.

There is much of interest besides wildlife to be seen. Portmoak Airfield was busy with gliders hoping for launch, but only during intermittent lulls in the breeze were one or two able to get airborne. We also met a great diversity of **dogs** along the path (the most ludicrous being a cross between a standard poodle and golden retriever), and numerous cyclists, bringing home how popular the route will be once it's possible to make a complete circuit of the Loch. The village of Kinross looks as if it could do with the economic boost that is bound to follow.

Colin McLeod

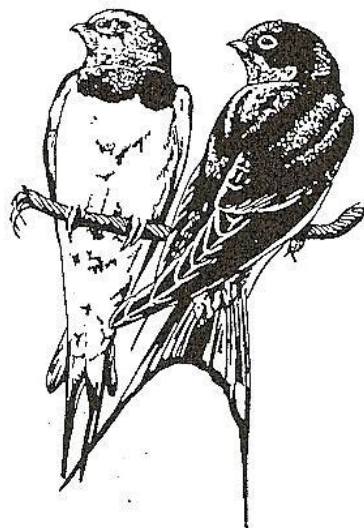
## BIRDWATCHING TO MUSIC - VANE FARM

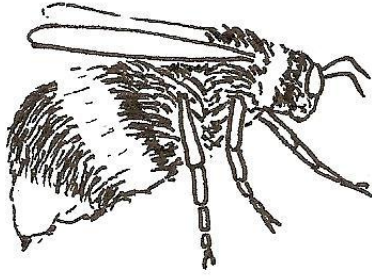
11th August

Most of the party had left the bus to walk around part of Loch Leven but a select band remained on board and soon arrived in the Vane Farm car park, only to find that Kinross Show was bustling with energy and noise in the fields next door. The Nats' party formed a mixed bunch, ranging from seven year old Lea, Lorna's grand-daughter (her grandson, Carl, did the medium length walk) to, well, it's not often I'm accused of being a gentleman, but I'd better not go any further! We made for the Visitor Centre and its telescopes and found that there was plenty to see in the area nearby and out on the loch - even in the quiet season for birds. **Swallows** and **house martins** swooped around making the most of the abundant insect life and scattered flocks of **goldfinches** and other small birds darted between the trees, while rafts of **tufted ducks**, a few **mallards** and one or two **pochards** bobbed out on the water. Soon the word went out that **ospreys** were quartering the surface of the loch and in a few moments the telescopes were fully manned (and womanned) to take in the distant but wonderful sight of three of the handsome 'fish-hawks' wheeling and soaring above the water and occasionally dipping a little to check on a shadow in the water below.

Only a few minutes later a **peregrine falcon** swooped suddenly out of the blue and carried its prey onto an islet in a small lochan a short distance from the loch shore. The handsome adult bird could be seen plucking and starting to feed and then, a few minutes later, a juvenile came in and landed close to the kill. The adult continued on for a short while and then flew off leaving the rest of the meal to the young bird. It fed for about half an hour and itself departed. Within just a few minutes a **raven** appeared and took its leisurely fill as well. It must have been watching from the steep hillside behind for the opportunity.

We gradually drifted off from the centre towards the hides closer to the loch and onto the hill behind the centre. Lea was fascinated by the life in the ponds, with plenty of **minnows**, feeding **snails** and small **worms** to catch the eye. Lorna, meanwhile, kept an eye open for butterflies, reporting numerous **meadow browns** and a few **ringlets**. From the nearest hide Margaret reported a couple of **moorhens** kept busy by four fluffy chicks and **greenfinches** and **goldfinches** at close quarters. A small group of **greylag geese** could be seen feeding warily on a grassy area, tight flocks of **starlings** zoomed around and the calls of **oystercatchers** and **redshanks** sounded along the loch edge. In the background, meanwhile, the skirl of pipes possibly encouraged better Scottish bird-watching! Perhaps it was rather too early to be reminded of autumn but a number of the **black-headed gulls** were already losing their chocolate-brown head colours and calling **curlews**, just down from the hills, were beginning to gather. In fact, from the new island hide a tight flock of nearly 200 of the long-billed waders could be seen preening and jostling on a small rushy peninsula. At the same time a couple of **swallows** swooped below the bridge and the bursts of excited twittering from under the walk-way proved that they were still feeding a late brood. Inside the hides quiet spells were enlivened by watching the tiny **spiders** dashing out at intervals to deal with the numerous dancing non-biting **midges** (*Chironomus* sp.) being caught in the webs spread across the corners of the lowest pane of glass.





The paths between the hides held plenty of interest as well. The steep banks sheltered numbers of flowers, both wild and planted. The colours of **creeping buttercups**, **bird's-foot trefoil**, **daisies** and **red campion** delighted the eye while, along one short stretch, the intense blue colours of planted **cornflowers** provided a vivid contrast. When the sun appeared numbers of **meadow brown butterflies** and **ringlets** flitted about with one or two **small tortoiseshells** and a single **darter dragonfly** to add interest. A visit to a flower-rich grassland, advertised as the 'world's first bumblebee meadow', proved an interesting stroll but only one or two **bumblebees** were evident. Even for those who

didn't walk far, it had proved a most interesting day.

Jim Cook

## EARLSHALL, TENTSMUIR

14th August

This afternoon trip was a follow-up to the discovery of a **bush cricket** (*Conocephalus dorsalis*) by Davie and Gordon on Earlsall in August 2010 (see Bulletin 35, page 37). The record was verified as a first for Scotland but a search in 2011 (Bulletin 36, page 37), by a few Nats, failed to re-find it. We hoped that getting more people on site might give a better chance of repeating the record. Though superficially like a **grasshopper**, bush crickets are distinguished by their rather long and thin antennae and, when disturbed, they tend to scuttle away rather than jump grasshopper-like.

A group of enthusiasts gathered, including our invertebrate expert and Hon. President, Gordon Corbet. After a short briefing we walked through a sharp shower towards the Earlsall site where the cricket was last seen. On our arrival the sun came out but it was destined to be like looking in the proverbial haystack. The undergrowth was knee-deep (at least! - Ed.) and also rather wet in many areas. Gordon Corbet suggested beating the taller bushes and smaller trees, without any success where the cricket was concerned. At least this dislodged a number of interesting insects which gave us something to look at.

After a couple of hours of bush cricketless effort we retreated and resolved to return another time. The day had not been in vain, however, and a number of interesting sightings were made, both on site and on the walk in. Anne recorded five species of **dragon** and **damselflies** including **common darter** which were present in huge numbers all over the dunes. The only other wildlife present in large numbers were **mosquitos**, of the biting variety - everyone agreed that they had never been bitten so badly or so often on any exposed skin and, occasionally, through clothing too.

We intend to return to continue the search for the bush cricket another year.

Gordon Maxwell

## BARBECUE AND OPENING OF THE CARSEGOWNIEMUIR HIDE

24th August

The new hide was officially opened before a crowd of 41 members and invited guests by our Honorary President, Gordon Corbet. Unfortunately, John Compton, the original owner of the quarry, was rather poorly and unable to join us but we were able to greet the commanding officer of the men who'd helped us carry the hide over the rough ground of the quarry, the lady who'd cut the memorial plaques, Harold Jackson, former Chairman of Angus FWAG, and several other local helpers. Gordon gave a short speech, used a pair of secateurs to cut the decorated ceremonial rope, made of plaited **nettle** stems (from the quarry, of course), and unveiled the memorial plaque above the door. After that the members and guests were invited in to sample the carpet-covered benches (many thanks to Dorothy Fyffe) and read the plaque inside recording the generous donation by and commemorating the memory of Frances Towns. All agreed that it was well set up and provided comfortable viewing in virtually all directions. Meanwhile, a couple of **great tits** flitted obligingly between the feeders and a



**moorhen** skulked around in the pond behind, a bit upset by all the noise and commotion. It would be well worthwhile to come back and visit the hide at a later and quieter date.

Some of the party returned directly to Carsegowniemuir cottage with Ronnie and Loraine Young but the rest were led off on a guided walk to explore the paths and by-ways of the quarry. Overhead, though, the clouds were darkening again and threatened rain. We made it back to the cottage just before the rain, in time for the barbecues to reach glowing heat and all joined in, encouraged by a delicious and warming mulled 'Chateau Allan', generously served by Jenny and Brian. The cottage and stables provided shelter and, anyway, everyone was well dressed for the weather. After a while the rain eased off and we all 'got stuck in' to the usual piles of food, with sausages, burgers, kebabs, steaks, buttered rolls, salads and sundry other goodies to tempt the palate. Millie and Purdey more than tempted their palates and did a great job cleaning up the odd dropped sausage or two and gratefully accepted the offered tit-bits. Everybody seemed to enjoy it immensely.

Jim Cook

## ALYTH DEN AND CADDAM WOOD

8th September

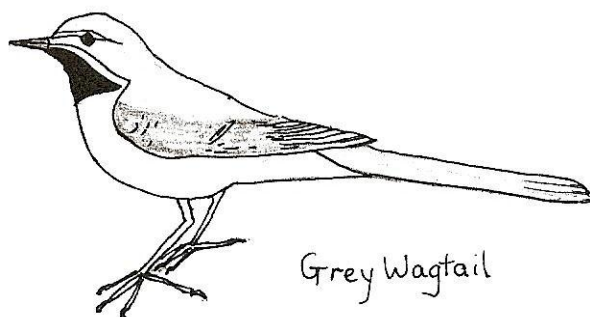
These two localities, our destinations for what was basically a fungal foray, are normally top of the list for that purpose. However, previous recces had not been promising this year and this did not only apply to these normally fungus rich woods. The overall picture throughout Angus was poor and probably the worst season for fungi for many a year.

The Nats arrived at Alyth Den, optimistic, as usual. Fungi were scarce and most of what survived had been mauled by smaller collectors - especially **mice** and **slugs**! However, some were identifiable including a selection of **russulas** - *R. fulva*, *R. blennius*, *R. fellea* and *R. emetica* were all seen. A large specimen of **giant polypore** *Meripilus giganteus* was seen growing, as it usually does, on a large tree stump. On the return journey on the upper path I also saw, on another stump, a specimen of *Lentinellus cochleatus*, easily identified by its strong smell of aniseed. The highlight here for many was a huge specimen of **orange peel fungus** (*Aleuria aurantia*) in an inaccessible place below the path.

At Caddam Wood we were presented with a similar scenario of scarcity and in some areas fungi were represented by only a few varieties such as the bracket fungi. **Hoof fungi** and **birch polypore** were common and, surprisingly, there were a fair number of the edible **chanterelles**, though these were rather small specimens.

Nevertheless, in both localities there was more to see than just fungi and the party spotted **red squirrel**, **buzzard**, **grey wagtail** and a selection of other small common birds. Those members of a botanical bent appeared to be well catered for by the profusion of wayside and woodland flowers.

Though apparently finding few fungi people made the most of it and, on the whole, enjoyed the day - at least I heard no complaints! Those who searched hard seemed to have a fairly long list of fungi despite the apparent scarcity and bad condition of specimens.



Gordon Maxwell

## ROCK AND SPINDLE, ST ANDREWS

22nd September

Celebrating and Retracing a Walk of 100 Years Ago

Rob Duck, Professor of Environmental Geoscience and Dean of the School of the Environment at the University of Dundee led a special walk from the East Sands at St Andrews, Fife, south along the Fife Coastal Path to the world famous Rock and Spindle volcanic vent. He stopped at

several places along the walk to explain to about 30 people why this part of coastline is internationally famous for its geological features.

This part of Scotland once formed part of a warm delta about 340 million years ago that led to the creation of layered deposits of the Lower Carboniferous sedimentary rocks composed mainly of sandstone and shale. These deposits were subsequently deformed and penetrated by a small volcano. At low tide, close to a sandstone stack known as the Maiden Rock, the layers of sedimentary rocks were evidently buckled by great forces to form the famous Maiden Rock Syncline (down-folded structure), and a little further along the coast visitors saw the Saddleback Anticline, eroded by wave action. Post-glacial uplifting of east Scotland's coastline has created evidence of raised wave-cut cliffs at St Andrews, and active landslides are features in evidence today.

The Rock and Spindle forms the central vent of a small volcano that erupted explosively through the sedimentary rocks. As evidence of this pyroclastic explosion, one can see clearly small angular boulders embedded in lava at the base of the vent and other ash beds as evidence of horizontal flow (subsequently tilted). On the side of the Rock & Spindle structure the typical polygonal patterns of cooling basalt are discernible in cross-section, in a manner similar to that found in the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland or on the Isle of Staffa. On sandstone sedimentary rocks beyond the volcanic area Professor Duck finally showed the visitors the massive fossilised roots of giant ferns (*Stigmara*) and the fossilised ripple marks of ancient tidal sands of the delta exposed in rocks beside the beach.

The walk was organised by the British Science Association, Tayside & Fife Branch in partnership with the Dundee Naturalists' Society to celebrate 100 years since the same geology outing was organised for the general public in 1912 as part of the historic visit of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (the original name of the British Science Association) to Dundee. A group photograph taken in front of the Rock & Spindle was taken from precisely the same place as a similar photo taken in 1912 (see below).

Brian Williamson and Anne Reid

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The 2012 party at the Rock and Spindle (Photograph by Brian Williamson)**





**'Heron with Pike' by Jon Cook**

The winning entry in the 2012 Photographic Competition for the Kim Eberst Memorial Trophy

#### ***Pseudoplectania nigrella* - Ebony Cups**



The rare fungus discovered at Ethie Woods by Stevie Smith and found to be only the fourth Scottish record. Its size means it is probably overlooked. Left hand photo has a finger for scale and shows a wet specimen. Right hand photo shows a dry cup with moss and spruce needles. (Photographs by Stevie Smith)

Article on page 39.



# AUTUMN MEETINGS

## BEAVERS

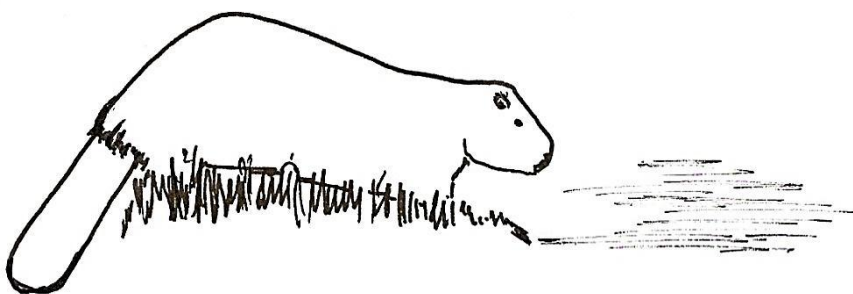
Paul Ramsay - 16th October

This well-attended opening meeting of the winter season heard a wide-ranging talk on beaver ecology, partly based on the speaker's own background of keeping beavers on his estate at Bamff, near Alyth since 2002, but also informed by the free-living beavers in Scotland - both 'official' and 'unofficial' populations - and a wider global perspective.

The Eurasian and North American beaver species diverged several million years ago, and can no longer interbreed, although they look virtually identical - the species have different chromosome numbers. Contrary to popular belief, Eurasian beavers are the slightly larger of the two species, and are also capable of building large dams - although, depending on the habitat, beavers may not build dams at all. In suitable terrain, they may live in burrows rather than lodges.

Both species were nearly exterminated by hunting, and by 1900 the Eurasian beaver was reduced to probably just 1200 animals in eight refugia, only two of which supported a sizeable number of animals. Historically, these were classed as evolutionary significant units, each with its own subspecies, but recent research has cast doubt over the importance of these distinctions, as the populations were united before and after the last Ice Age, and the morphological and genetic divergences are not considered sufficient to justify differentiation into subspecies. Beavers have been reintroduced to many countries across their former range, and the UK has lagged behind most of its European neighbours in restoring them as a keystone species.

As it is thought that the native Scottish beaver population was most closely related to the Scandinavian population, Norwegian beavers have been used for the official Scottish beaver trial in Knapdale. This population suffered a particularly severe genetic bottleneck, being descended from a mere handful of animals, and it has been suggested that the 'wife swapping' reported from the trial could be the beavers' attempt to avoid further inbreeding within a small group of animals. This might also explain the great distances that some individuals are prepared to travel searching for a mate - even venturing across salt water to visit offshore islands. The beavers living at Bamff were sourced from Bavarian stock, descended from multiple populations, and have bred readily. It is thought that the free-living beavers that are now found throughout much of the Tay river system are also predominantly of Bavarian origin.



Beavers are strongly territorial, which encourages young animals to colonise new territory, but limits the maximum population density in any location. Beavers very rarely go farther than 50 metres from water, and spend most of their time within

five metres of the water's edge. If necessary, they will dig canals to take the water's edge to where they want it. They have a diverse, entirely vegetarian, diet, with nearly 200 food plants recorded, but most in small quantities. Their winter rations are mostly the underbark of trees, along with rhizomes. Trees are felled mostly in autumn and winter, so readily coppice in the growing season - a different pattern to most browsing animals which eat year-round and kill the tree.

The resultant 'coarse woody debris' is increasingly recognised as important to freshwater ecosystems and fisheries, just one of the ecosystem services provided by beavers, including biodiversity, habitat connectivity, carbon capture, flow regulation, and water quality. The EU Water Framework Directive, with its objective of promoting good water quality at a catchment scale, can be seen as a charter for beavers.

The Society is planning to visit Bamff to see the beavers in May 2013 (see excursion programme for details). Meanwhile, you can read more about them at the Bamff Estate website [www.bamff.co.uk/beavers.html](http://www.bamff.co.uk/beavers.html), and about the official Scottish beaver trial at [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk).

Colin McLeod



## ORCHARDS AND THE AULD ALLIANCE

Crispin Hayes - 30th October

Dr Hayes has been involved with orchards since the 2003 survey of the Newburgh trees. Over 800 fruit trees were looked at, often in private gardens, and including plums, apples, pears and many wild plums (myrobalan). More survey work followed on the Carse of Gowrie orchards although it has been difficult to identify distinct varieties.

It is believed that many old fruit trees were introduced to Scotland by the great religious Abbeys from the twelfth century onwards. Some of the orchard trees surviving today may date back as far as the Act of Union of 1707 as some of these, pear especially, are very long-lived. As well as the tradition of medicinal plants the culture of fruit trees was an important feature of monastic gardens with varieties of apples and pears introduced from France. Many of these have fascinating French names (eg Longueville and Auchan) but have fallen from favour as they are not considered good eating, though it was always intended that the main use of the fruit was to be stored or cooked. However, this knowledge has been lost.

Pear trees may live for up to 300 years and with early blossom and distinctive height are a wonderful feature. In spring it becomes easy to spot old orchard sites where pear trees remain.

Old orchards offer a good nectar source in the spring, along with a favourite food for bullfinches - flower buds! The fissured bark of old fruit trees offers shelter to many insects, while in autumn the fallen fruit is often eaten by birds and hedgehogs. If the area under the trees is managed as meadow or is used by livestock then the biodiversity of the orchard is even richer.

Many thanks to Crispin for a fascinating insight into the lost art of fruit culture in Scotland.

Clare Reaney

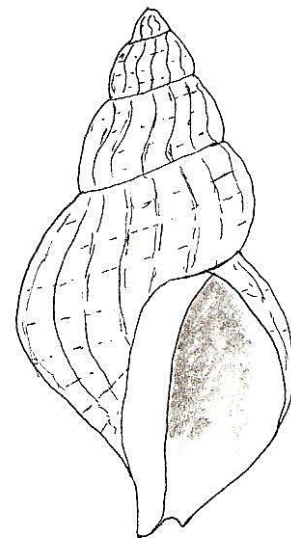
## WESTHAVEN TO CARNOUSTIE

10th November

A grand total of 19 members and friends enjoyed an excursion along the beach on a wonderfully calm and sunny morning, a great and welcome change from the previous week. Just as the leader was saying how varied the wildlife along there was and how anything could turn up, someone cried "There's a **peregrine**" and, sure enough, a young **peregrine** flew right past us along the beach, swung up and winnowed quickly over the houses to disappear to the north. The bird couldn't have timed it better if it had tried!

The group started off towards Easthaven along the path and then moved down to the beach. The tide was rather too high to allow for explorations of the seashore rocks but at least lots of seaweed and a variety of creatures could be found along the strandline. Some members of the group spent time looking at the differences between **winkles**, **whelks** and **buckies**, with **flat periwinkles** and **dog-whelks** to complicate the issues. They also compared **bladder wrack** with **serrated wrack** and several similar related species, met **egg-wrack** and its common red epiphyte, *Polysiphonia*, and then the big **oar-weeds** with their complicated holdfasts. Meanwhile, others moved on to look out over the sea for **cetaceans** and **seabirds**. **Redshanks** and **oystercatchers**, a few **sanderlings** and a scatter of **turnstones** could be seen on the shoreline with **eiders** and **cormorants** and numbers of larger **gulls** out to sea - but, disappointingly, no **dolphins** or **whales**. Gordon and a few others caught sight of the **peregrine** making a return foray to the beach but it soon disappeared again.

We turned back at the Craigmill Burn by the seashore cottage but kept a careful eye out for wildlife large and small. **Sea rocket** was still in flower in places, with numerous bright pink flowers of **stork's-bill** dotting the eroding sand bank behind the shoreline. It was obviously very sheltered along that stretch. Stevie pointed out a good colony of the tiny marine **spring-tail** *Anurida maritima* under a piece of drift wood. Others found pieces of **hornwort**, a colonial animal, and lovely



purple-pink fronds of the seaweed, *Gigartina stellata*. Further along, towards Carnoustie, a **heron** stood sentinel and numerous hungry **black-headed gulls** wheeled in the freshening breeze.

By this time the birds weren't the only ones feeling the pangs of hunger and most of us were rather early into the hotel for a well-deserved lunch. Jean Colquhoun and Jean Robertson met us there. Also there, we are pleased to say, and purely by chance, was Edna Slidders, who hasn't been able to come out on excursions with us for several years but very much enjoyed meeting her Nats friends again. It was a fitting end to a great morning.

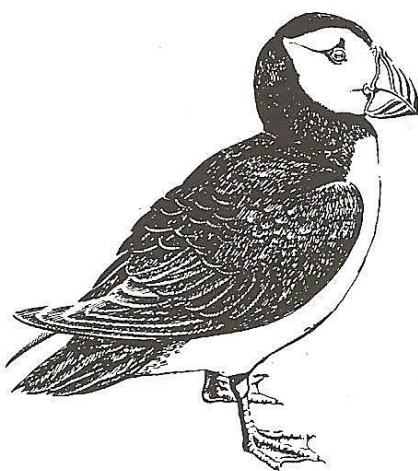
Jim Cook

## SEABIRD ISLANDS IN A CLIMATE OF CHANGE EFFECTS OF BIRDS ON VEGETATION OF THE FORTH ISLANDS

(Joint meeting with the Botanical Society of Scotland)

Rene van der Wal - 13th November

Rene van der Wal is Reader in Environmental Sustainability at Aberdeen University and is an active researcher into the ecology of islands, moorland and arctic habitats. His talk focussed on the interactions between plants, birds and mammals on the Forth islands and, in particular, the Isle of May and Craigleith. He described how sea birds brought in nutrients such as nitrogen from the sea and the way in which the vegetation was affected.



In recent years the number of **puffins** and **gulls** has increased greatly on the Isle of May and this also has imported a considerable amount of nitrogen - high levels of ammonia are now detectable up to some distance from the shore. Pictures from the 1930s show a dense growth of **thrift** (*Armeria maritima*), which does not benefit from increased nitrogen, along the shore, but this is now very much reduced. It has been replaced by **sea campion** (*Silene vulgaris* ssp *maritima*) a species that does benefit from nitrogen. Some other species such as **sorrel** (*Rumex acetosa*) have not changed greatly over this period.

Birds also have an impact on vegetation by creating bare ground (**gulls**) or making burrows (**puffins**). At one time gulls were culled heavily.

Grazing by **rabbits** also has an influence, as they reduce the height of vegetation particularly grasses such as **Yorkshire fog** (*Holcus lanatus*), which can inhibit **thrift** and

**sea campion** growth. This has been studied by fencing off small areas and also during a recent **rabbit** myxomatosis outbreak. **Seals** create small bare areas near the shore where they haul out.

Craigleith Island has presented a different picture where a considerable growth of **tree mallow** (*Lavatera arborea*) has recently greatly reduced **puffin** numbers, as they find it difficult to burrow amongst it, although its original spread was helped by their disturbance of the ground. The **tree mallow** may have also been helped by climate change, as it is not frost resistant, and by the loss of **rabbits**, which graze it, through myxomatosis. In other parts of the British Isles such as Cornwall tree mallow has not proved to be invasive. Volunteers now clear the tree mallow regularly, although this may need to continue for a long time as its seeds appear to be long lived.

These fascinating studies have shown how important it is to study populations of plants and animals over a long period and the very strong interactions between different groups of organisms.

Brian Ballinger

## VIVA LAS VEGAS

Stevie Smith - 27th November

To say that the audience was completely blown away, with the quality of the photography, is no exaggeration. Stevie and her husband Jim, both of whom take great photographs, have had two trips to Arizona and Utah, where they started each trip at the gambling capital of America, Las Vegas. They firstly branched out from Vegas and visited places with magical names, Red Rock Canyon and

Mojave to name but two, and the flora and fauna were just as magical. We were shown **Mojave yuccas, Joshua trees, amphibians, reptiles and insects**, all evolved to live in the desert, and the associated hot springs. One plant, the **desert trumpet**, was once thought to indicate **gold**. Unfortunately none was found.

Stevie and Jim then headed out on a round trip, taking us to Lake Mead, Boulder City, the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Zion National Park, and the magnificent Wave. En route Stevie, in her excitement, got seriously dehydrated and had to be resuscitated by Jim. She didn't even have the strength to suck the water from the bottle, but with Jim pouring small amounts into her mouth she slowly recovered. However, her efforts were not in vain, since she photographed **ground squirrels** of all shapes and sizes, **chuckwalla monitor lizards, western jack rabbits, praying mantis, barrel cactus, tarantula wasps** and many species of **butterfly**.

At the Boulder City Wetlands Centre, created in 1995 using waste water, **great grey herons** and **California quail** were seen. Then at Temple Bar near Lake Mead, they set up a moth trap, found **western grebes**, which were surprisingly un-fazed, and to top it all they were challenged by an aggressive, gun-toting guard. The Smiths were in the wrong place. Happily all was resolved by a phone call to one of their contacts, who vouched for them. The lake was explored by kayak, which proved to be a little choppy. Rather them than me!

Following the Colorado River eventually led to the Grand Canyon, and both north and south rims were visited. The constantly changing weather made for some fantastic views, with the colours changing by the minute. The spectacular Horse Shoe Bend was particularly awesome. Throughout their time exploring this extensive area, the following were seen and photographed: **turkey vulture, nuthatch, mule deer** at Mexican Hat Rock, and at Moki Dugway Trail, which wound its way down into the canyon, a lonely **coyote**. They also found time, and energy, to visit the epic Monument Valley, so familiar from numerous cowboy films, Page Rock, Balancing Rock, and go on a cruise on Lake Powell. At a bridge over the Colorado River they eventually found the much longed-for **Californian condors**.

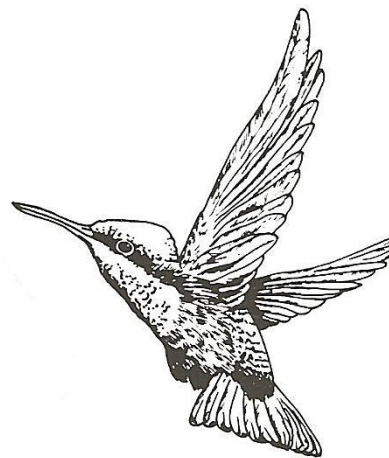
As if that was not enough, the ever changing colours of Bryce Canyon thrilled us. Here the Smiths saw **pronghorn antelopes**, and on one of their many walks, they came face to face with a **black bear**. They casually took some good shots but when the bear started to run at them, they took to their heels and ran, but unfortunately, only to an area which was a bit of dead end. However, brave Jim saved the day, by running at the oncoming bear, shouting and waving his arms, which appeared to confuse the animal and stopped it in his tracks. What a hero!

More wonderful geology was to be found at Zion Canyon, along with **toads, moths, Apache spiders, cardinal butterflies, humming birds**, and assorted **lizards**. Nearby, a river hike led them to a geological feature known as The Subway. The sides of the river have been eroded to form a tube formation which curved overhead.

The finale was, by far the most spectacular - The Wave. A special permit is required to access this three mile hike, and the most unbelievable and stunning sandstone gorge I have ever seen. My description will not in any way give justice to the site. The sandstone gully twists and turns, with the sides striped in many garish colours, and coupled with the clear blue sky and the rock pool reflections, the effect was truly magnificent.

The evening ended with a short question session followed by a rapturous vote of thanks.

Brian Allan



## AN INTRODUCTION TO LOCH LEVEN

Craig Nisbet -11th December

No one who came to learn more about Loch Leven could have failed to have their spirits lifted by the enthusiasm and energy shown by this young man during his interesting talk. Craig has been at Loch Leven National Nature Reserve for 5 years and is Reserve Officer. He has worked in Ghana and Canada in the past and was delighted to return to Fife, where he grew up, to join Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in an area he knows and loves. Although SNH has 47 sites across Scotland, Loch

Loch Leven should be considered as one of the most important. It is a designated SSSI, a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention and a Special Protection Area (SPA).

The site is privately owned and there are many stakeholders who work together closely as interests overlap. Historic Scotland, for example, own Castle Island and run boat trips from the pier in the summer months, for visitors. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency are involved and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) monitor the water quality. Perth and Kinross Council have been involved with the Heritage Trail around the shore. The RSPB at Vane Farm (now called RSPB Loch Leven) have had their visitor centre on the south side of the loch for many years and because of this, many bird watchers have visited the area over the years. SNH are also actively encouraging visitors to the area.

Spring on St Serf's, the largest island on the loch, is a busy time as it is a prime nesting area for many breeds of **duck**, particularly, **tufted**, **mallard** and **gadwall**. In fact, this is the largest breeding population of **tufted duck** in the UK. The area is also popular for nesting **lesser black-backed gulls**, which act as protection to the ducks and ducklings against members of the **crow** family. Once the ducklings hatch, safety on the water becomes paramount and they get their protection from overhanging vegetation round the edges. Once on the water, however, the ducklings' biggest danger is from the voracious **pikes**, attacking from below.

This area also has unusual plants growing, eg **coral root orchid**, **lesser water plantain** and **Loch Leven spearwort**. There are large areas of **holy-grass**, formerly used in buildings and known in Poland, where it is more commonly found, as **bison grass**. In Castle Bay, the **lesser butterfly orchid** is found, numbering between 250 and 400 plants annually.

In summer, the area is alive with life from aquatic, insect and mammal life. Regularly seen are many **roe deer**, **hares**, **otters** and **red squirrels**; even a **pine marten** has been seen recently. An on-going cull of **grey squirrels** continues. **Water voles** are present and all encouragement is given to them as, across the UK, there has been a 95% decline in recent years.

Loch Leven is known the world over for its famous **brown trout**. Many countries around the world, including Canada, Peru, New Zealand and China, have had their lakes stocked with fish from Loch Leven. This is a key interest to the Kinross Estate company, which is also benefitting from improved water quality, resulting in more and better fish in recent times. The number of fishing boats on the loch has increased from 10 to 15, after a high of 50 a few years ago.

A new **midge** variety has recently been discovered on Loch Leven. These non-biting beasts are vital in the food chain and are ideal for **ducklings** to eat on the water, as well as for **swifts** and **swallows** overhead, which appear in early summer and again in late summer as they pass, during migration.

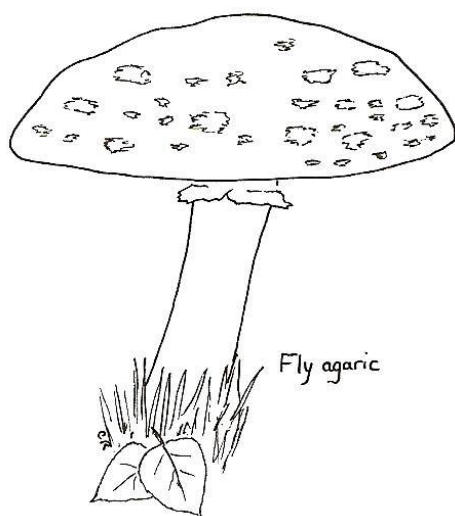
There is a wide diversity of insect life, including **common blue** and **azure damselflies** and **small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly**. Wild flowers grow round the loch and there is a wildflower meadow round at the Vane Farm RSPB site. Many volunteers are involved in the annual monitoring of insects in the area.

In autumn, hundreds of **mute swans** gather on the loch and begin their moult. They become flightless while they grow their winter plumage and the loch turns white as if snow has fallen. Migrant **whooper swans** from Iceland appear accompanied by hundreds of **pink feet geese**. Around 5-10% of the global population of these geese come here in winter and can number up to 27,000. **Pintail**, **teal**, **shoveler**, **wigeon** and **tufted duck**, arrive en masse from Siberia, Scandinavia and eastern Europe, sometimes up to 60,000 birds - consequently, numbers are very difficult to confirm in the autumn.

As well as the regulars, there are of course rarities which drop in for a short stay or a longer time. These have included **black swan**, **sea eagle**, **ruddy shelduck**, **American white-rumped sandpiper** and **green winged teal**. These would be either escapees or birds blown off course.

Various fungi grow in the area. These have included an uncommon **giant puffball** at Burleigh car park, **fly agaric** and **waxcaps** which grow on healthy grassland meadow.

One of the duties of SNH at the loch is to make new space for wildlife eg managing the habitat to suit the wildlife which is already there. Loch Leven is surrounded by agricultural land, therefore interference is essential. Grass is cut to suit nesting **lapwings**. A mowing regime keeps





encroaching **willow** and other shrubs at bay. Mechanical diggers were used to create pools for birds as part of the Carse Hall wetland restoration project. There has been a major restoration project on St Serf's island, to control **willow** and remove trees to increase the amount of grass verges for breeding ducks. Two new ponds were re-created where they had dried out over the years.

SNH also undertake an annual **gull** count on St Serf's. Years ago, there was a well-known breeding colony of **black headed gulls**, now it is largely **lesser black-backed gulls**. Amongst their other tasks, in managing the reserve, they actively encourage visitors to the area. There are new and old bird hides for visitors. The circular route round the loch will hopefully be finished for walkers and cyclists by the end of 2013 or early in 2014. Two miles have recently been added to the route near Factory Bay and a new hide (Mill Hide) installed. This has recently won an award for design. This is a particularly good area for viewing ducklings in spring and early summer.

Craig works closely with volunteer groups who provide massive amounts of help, including tree planting, scrub clearing and monitoring of invertebrates. He arranges educational visits by school groups, both primary and secondary, involving them in projects and encouraging their teachers to use the loch as an outdoor classroom.

One of his duties is to monitor local access and provide guidance. Canoeists for example must watch out for young birds. They should not paddle out on the water at all in winter, due to geese and wildfowl numbers. Whilst monitoring fishermen and bird watchers, he provides advice and guidance. He also leads regular guided walks and gives talks. For those who would like to find out more, the website is [www.nnr.scotland.org.uk/lochleven](http://www.nnr.scotland.org.uk/lochleven).

Liz Olejnik

## THE HISTORY OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

Jim Cook - 12th December

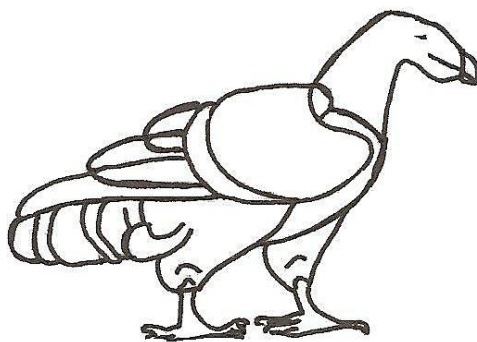
Our contribution to the Afternoon Lecture Series was given this year by our own Jim Cook who has encyclopaedic knowledge of local natural historians but had added more from his researches on the subject.

With its wide variety of habitats, Angus and the surrounding areas have a wide range of local wildlife. This was recognised very early on by the Picts. Their wonderful stone carvings contain easily recognisable images of such species as **eagles**, **deer** and **fish** all of which must have been of importance to them. The first written historical record of natural history mentioned was a plant list of 1664 by the Minister at Glamis. The famous Patrick Blair carried out a scientific dissection of an **elephant** in Dundee in 1704 and formed a local scientific group. However, many of these people were also Jacobites and it was only Blair's Fellowship of The Royal Society which spared him the fate of his friends at Tyburn in London.

During the 18th Century natural history was more noticed and the parish descriptions of the Statistical Account of 1791-99 often contain a section on local plants or animals. These were usually written by the Parish Minister, and Murroes, for example, lists birds of passage including **cuckoo** and **swallow**.

By the 19th Century there was a much wider interest in natural history and many of the most well-known of the local natural historians are well-documented. These include the botanist George Don of Doohillock, Forfar, who explored the local area extensively, including the Glens and made a number of significant discoveries. He sometimes worked with Robert Brown, originally from Montrose (and, later, the discoverer of Brownian motion) and they found the rare *Eriophorum alpinum* at Restenneth Moss which was lost soon after due to marl digging.

Though Edinburgh based, William MacGillivray had Angus specimens in his collection and J H Balfour took Edinburgh University students on outings which included Angus sites. On one such trip 15,000 specimens were gathered in five weeks - no wonder plants became extinct! Dundonian



Pictish eagle

William Gardiner published a Flora of Forfarshire in 1847 and also studied **mosses** and other lower plants. His favourite was the **maiden pink**, found at Red Head.

John Hood was a metal turner by profession, in Dundee, and made his own microscope with which he made a number of discoveries of new species of **rotifers**. These tiny, multicellular animals with beating hairs are found in water and Hood's studies of them resulted in him being elected a fellow of the Royal Microscopic Society, though he sent his specimens to Goss to be named. Unusually for a man of such humble origins, he got an obituary in the prestigious scientific journal Nature.

F B White's Flora of Perthshire was published at the end of the 19th Century, J A Harvey Brown was working on birds and mammals and John Ramage on a **snail** collection which is still in the University of Dundee Museum. Professor D'Arcy Thompson and his associates Professor Geddes and Dr W T Calman also made contributions to local knowledge.

More recently natural history has been studied locally by such familiar names as Ursula Duncan (**lichens**) and Baxter and Rintoul (**birds**). Ruth Ingram and Henry Noltie wrote the Flora of Angus of 1981, and this has been followed by an excellent updated flora by Barbara Hogarth in 2012. Jim finished his excellent overview by mentioning a few local naturalists of today, known to many and mostly present at the talk (and also members of the Nats).

Anne Reid

## THE STRATHMORE METEORITE FALL OF 1917

David Lampard - 18th December

Meteors originate in the asteroid belt, between Mars and Jupiter, and only become meteorites if they hit the Earth. The three main types of meteorite are equivalent to the asteroid types of their origin: stony, stony-iron and iron meteorites. They are all mixtures of iron and nickel with silicates, but in differing proportions. Stony meteorites are the commonest, accounting for 94%, and stony-iron the rarest at 1-2%.

Around 2,000 meteorites are thought to land on Earth each year, amounting to about 40,000 tonnes, but they are only observed relatively rarely. Only 21 have been seen to fall in the UK since about 1790 with six of these in Scotland. The three main falls were 1804 at High Possil, 1830 at the North Inch, Perth and 1917 in Strathmore.

The Strathmore fall is well-documented and was first seen on the Northumberland coast heading north west. It exploded just west of Dundee at 1.15pm on 3rd December but was little noticed, perhaps because it was attributed to something war-related at this stage of WWI. An eyewitness, Henry Coates of Perth, noted it in his diary but thought that the explosion was a working quarry. Four main stones were recovered: South Corston (1kg), Essendy (11kg), Cairsie and Keithick (1kg) with the latter falling through the roof of a house. By the time the Courier photographer arrived the roof had been mended so the image in the paper was a fake, with a scratch on the negative purporting to show the damage! Even though Henry Coates reported the finding of the meteorites he was not given due credit for this, nor any reward, and all pieces were claimed by the Crown.

Dundee Museum has recently acquired a piece of the Essendy stone which originally had been cut from the meteorite in Edinburgh and sent to London for analysis.

After such an informative talk, everyone was ready for the social side of the evening. All enjoyed cups of tea and baking from a splendid spread brought by members. Thanks to Lorna and her helpers for the organisation of the catering.

Anne Reid

## MEMBERS' ARTICLES

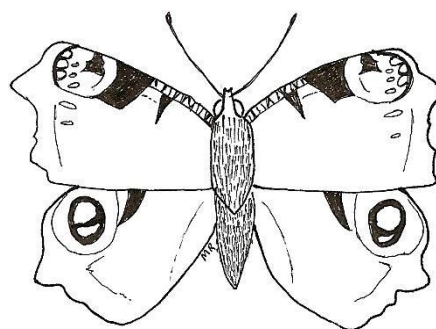
### INTERESTING SIGHTINGS 2012

After a relatively mild winter, spring started with a bang. The week beginning 26th March produced new March record high temperatures for Scotland on 3 successive days - mostly at Aboyne (max. 23.6°C) - but we did get to 21°C in Dundee on 27th and 28th. This produced a rash of earlier-

than-usual butterfly, bee and bird sightings. On Tuesday 3rd April we awoke to a fall of heavy, wet snow which distorted and broke trees and bushes. The rest of April was cool and very showery, with floods in England.

The remainder of the summer seemed to be unrelentingly wet, though Nats outings were often lucky with the weather. Ground vegetation became very lush but many birds were unsuccessful over several breeding attempts. Butterflies were very scarce until the early autumn when the weather improved a bit. The autumn finished with a large number of waxwing sightings - an irruption year for this handsome bird.

Brian Ballinger	BB	Dundee, West end
Joy Cammack	JoyC	Birkhill
Jim Cook	JC	Broughty Ferry
Tom Cunningham	TC	Tentsmuir SNH Warden
Monica Edwards	ME	Invergowrie
Pat Gaff	PG	Dundee
Alban Houghton	AH	Letham, Angus
Bob McCurley	BMCC	Dundee
Colin McLeod	CM	Dundee, Johnson Avenue
Jack Moody	JM	Barnhill
Liz Olejnik	LO	Wormit
Margaret Palin	MP	Broughty Ferry
Bede Pounder	BP	Dundee, Forfar Road
Anne Reid	AR	Monifieth
Colin Reid	CR	Monifieth
Stevie Smith	SS	Arbroath, St Vigean
Jane Stewart	JS	Barry village
Brian Williamson	BW	Dundee, Law area



**1st January** 2.45am Having just arrived back from the fireballs at Stonehaven, a most welcome sound greeted the ear - a bird singing lustily in the garden next door. It was a **blackbird** exercising his lungs and syrinx; rather premature, with most of the winter still to come! Or did he know something that we didn't? JC.

**1st January** 10.00am There in its usual place in the garden was a shy **snowdrop**, having just opened. I'd noticed the plant with its flower bud a few days previously but this was the earliest flowering ever! So far, the winter had been very mild. JC.

**9th January** Large flocks of 40 or more **fieldfares** with some **redwings** were flying round Carsgowniemuir Quarry and, in the fading afternoon light, wheeling bunches of cawing **rooks** crossed over the quarry on their way to their roost. JC.

**14th January** A rather unexpected **peacock butterfly** in our garden. Cold and sunny but after two very mild days. LO.

**15th January** Out on my bike (!) on a lovely sunny but frosty day I kept hearing **great tits** and **wrens** joining the **robins** in song. The recent mild, sunny spell has tricked them into thinking spring is on the way. AR.

**16th January** A **green woodpecker** heard and seen in Ethie Woods, which is exciting as we've never seen one there before. SS.

**25th January** On waking up early one calm but cold morning, I'd heard thin bird song and realised it was a few of the local **robins**, already staking their claims for the choicest territories. JC.

**25th January** A stunning pair of **goosanders** on the South Esk at Brechin. SS.

**26th January** Pleasantly surprised to see a male **siskin** on my nyger feeder. It was only there for a few minutes before flying off, despite no competitors for the feeder. AR.

**26th January** I heard a **curlew** apparently right in our garden. But the song was coming from a **starling** sitting in my **hazel** shrub! I was briefly taken in. I have heard them imitate before, but I think this was the best one. SS.

**6th February** While **oystercatchers** on open grass are common, the appearance of two under the **pine** trees at the south edge of the Reres Park in Broughty Ferry looked somewhat out of place. AR.

**9th February** There is still a **parrot** on the loose in the area. Heard and seen in the garden several times in recent days. MP.

- 10th February** Three **siskins** on the nyger and peanut feeders. I have already seen more this year in the garden than in the whole of last year. AR.
- 13th February** A very good sighting of a **sea eagle** on the very edge of Wormit. It flew about five yards above my head, and was clearly seen with white tail and radio antenna. No wing tag was seen, it may just have been on its right wing and out of sight. LO.
- 16th February** A large flock of around a hundred **fieldfares** flew up the length of the quarry at around mid-day and then, later in the afternoon, crossed silently over, apart from the sound of their massed wing beats, heading south towards Willstead's wood and possible roosting sites. I wonder how long it will be before they leave us to migrate north again? JC.
- 17th February** A **sparrowhawk** at the garden pond, appearing to inspect the croaking **frogs**. BB.
- 17th February** I went out birding and saw my first **spotted redshank** at Guardbridge amongst the **redshanks** - a particularly good clear view of the bird enabled me to identify it myself - much better than in the far distance through someone else's scope! There was also a redhead **smew** at Morton Lochs, amongst other things. AR.
- 19th February** A **bearded seal** on the sands at Monifieth, apparently unconcerned that it was the centre of **human** interest or possibly in poor health. It did eventually work its way down the beach and back into the water, but I had good views of its wonderful whiskers. There had been a report in the paper of one on the Tentsmuir side of the river a few days earlier and, sadly, of one found dead further north a couple of weeks later. CR.
- 28th February** **Frog spawn** the garden pond. I counted approximately 30 **frogs** today. BB.
- 1st March** A lovely sunny day. Saw a **honey bee** on crocus and a **7-spot ladybird** enjoying the sunshine. ME.
- 2nd March** At Balmerino I saw my first **primroses** in flower and a group of five **bullfinches**. LO.
- 10th March** Around teatime Keith saw a **snipe** in the reeds of Invergowrie bay. ME.
- 11th March** A **red-tailed bumblebee** at Montrose Basin. Particularly early for this species. SS.
- 14th March** On a warm sunny day, Dorothy Fyffe noted the first **small tortoiseshell butterfly** of the year at Carsegowniemuir quarry. JC.
- 18th March** From the vantage point of the headland above the 'sphinx' just to the south of Carlingheugh Bay, a single **minke whale** could just be seen several hundred metres offshore. Its long low back with a tiny dorsal fin appeared a few times and then it swam off to the north and west away from the coast. JC.
- 21st March** My first **chiffchaff** of the year heard near to the Ranger Centre at Crombie Country Park (one was seen at Montreathmont on 18th March). I was also investigated by a queen **wasp** which stopped long enough for me to identify it as a **Norwegian wasp** (*Dolichovespula norvegica*). AR.
- 22nd March** The local Forest Ranger spotted a **great grey shrike** in the forest down Polish Camp Road, Tentsmuir, and even managed a photograph. TC.
- 26th March** In St Vigeans Den I heard a **chiffchaff** and heard and saw a **great spotted woodpecker** drumming. The latter is no longer visiting my garden nearby. SS.
- 26th March** The **willow** and **blackthorn** flowers at Templeton Woods attracted a number of **bumblebees** - mostly **buff-tailed** (*Bombus terrestris*) but also an unusually early **red-tailed** (*B. lapidarius*). The **wood anemones** and **wood sorrel** were in full flower and a party of **bullfinches** was also seen. PG.
- 26th March** While driving towards Braedownie (Clova) a flash of **ermine** (*Mustela erminea*) raced across the road. At that time there was no snow below 700m. JM.
- 30th March** In the Dundee Botanic Gardens we saw a male **orange tip butterfly**, presumably so early after the week of record-breaking temperatures for March. Also heard at least two **chiffchaffs** singing in different parts of the gardens. AR.
- 3rd April** Awoke to a good covering of wet, heavy snow bending all the bushes in the garden. Feeders very busy with **tits**, **goldfinch**, **chaffinch**, **greenfinch** and **house sparrow** but also a single male **yellowhammer** standing out like a beacon against all the whiteness. AR.
- 5th April** On a walk from Tullybaccart I saw two **ravens** and a female **hen harrier** beyond Lundie Crag. Down on Long Loch there was nothing very exciting, just **mute swans**, **tufted ducks**, **little grebes**, **cormorants** and **pied wagtails**. LO.



**12th April** Two colonies of **yellow figwort** (*Scrophularia vernalis*) in flower, were found during a ramble on the Newtyle Railway Network. This is a non-native plant, but the numbers suggest it must have been present there for some time. JM.

**12th April** My first two **chiffchaffs** of the year at Jock's Hole, just west of Wormit. LO.

**17th April** A **redpoll** visited the garden feeders. ME.

**29th April** First **peacock butterfly** seen at Carsegowniemuir Quarry. It had slightly tatty wings - perhaps had overwintered as an adult in shelter. A short while later a small **green-veined white** flitted across the path. Another first for the year was **swallows** flying low over the quarry. The Youngs reported that a single swallow had appeared a few days earlier in the week but another three appeared on 28th April. The first **house martins** had arrived nearly a fortnight before. JC.

**1st May** Saw my first **orange tip butterflies**, one at Wormit Bay and another in my garden, about half a mile away. LO.

**1st May** A very rare bird locally, a **hawfinch**, visited a friend's garden in Forfar. BMCC.

**8th May** A sunny day at times. Saw a **great spotted woodpecker** on the feeders at teatime. ME.

**11th May** Saw my first **swift** of the year flying low over the A92 near Muirdrum in wet weather. AR.

**15th May** On a run up the Law at lunchtime, I saw a **crow** pecking at the back of a baby **rabbit**, apparently trying to pick it up. The **rabbit** hopped into a bush, followed by the **crow** that seemed set on waiting at the other side for it to emerge. CR.

**18th May** At 7.30am on a rather damp morning a pair of **bullfinches** seen in the front garden. The **woodpecker** still coming regularly. ME.

**31st May** Saw a **fox** being chased by a **roe deer** across the Weilstaves Track at Balgavies Loch. I felt it should have been the other way round. AH.

**2nd June** A **European bee-eater** was seen in Craigmill Den. BMCC.

**21st June** A single **bat**, almost certainly a **pipistrelle** by its size and flight patterns, on a relatively warm, if damp, evening in Dawson Park along the tree line with Fairfield road where I'd seen them several times in previous years. JC.

**27th June** A **little egret** arrived at Montrose Basin. BMCC.

**5th July** An **avocet** put in an appearance at Westhaven and pleased many observers. BMCC.

**16th July** Four **foxes** in the garden together. They must have been breeding nearby somewhere. BB.

**18th July** Great views of six **red admiral** (and perhaps a **small tortoiseshell**) butterflies sunning themselves on the house walls. Haven't seen so many at the same time all summer, it's been so wet. JC.

**14th August** At a very low tide east of Tayport saw more than 200 **ringed plover**, **oystercatcher**, **curlew**, **knot** (one still in summer plumage), **dunlin** (some in summer plumage), **heron**, **grey plover** (c. 20), **swallow** and **house martin**. BW.

**14th August** A lovely sunny evening brought a **small tortoiseshell** and a **red admiral** to my buddleia. ME.

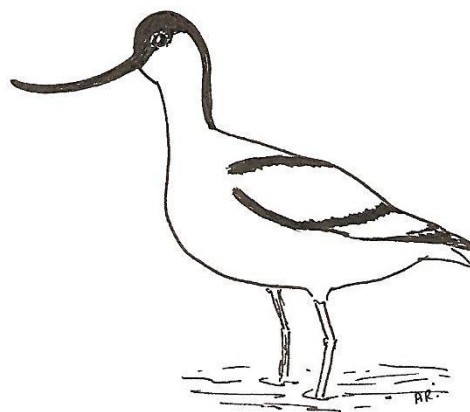
**18th August** On a very humid day I was surprised to see a female **blackcap** in our **wild cherry** trees, a female **whitethroat** feeding on insects in the **St John's wort** and a **greenfinch** pecking at **hawkweed** leaves on the lawn in our garden. BW.

**21st August** **Berberis** berries provided a rich feeding ground for **blackcaps**, **song thrush** and **blackbirds** in our garden. BW.

**23rd August** A **comma** butterfly in the garden after an unconfirmed sighting the previous day. BP.

**26th August** A pair of **great crested grebes** with two juveniles on Loch of Lintrathen gave superb views from the east hide; then watched an **osprey** struggle to take a large fish and get airborne before carrying it over the hill; a wonderful experience. BW.

**28th August** It was almost dark but the distinctive sound took me outside. There, high above, was a skein of calling **geese**. I think they were **pink-feet**, by their calls, but it was too dark to see and be certain. Surely they were early? JC.





**30th August** Over 130 **goosander** males in eclipse seen offshore at Earlsferry to Kincaig on a warm sunny evening. About 50 **guillemots** with juveniles bobbed off shore and the mournful cry of **seals** reached us from a small rock in the bay. BW.

**7th September** A **nuthatch** visited the feeders beside the Ranger Centre at Camperdown Park. They are steadily moving into the area - keep your eyes open! BMcC.

**9th September** A **comma butterfly** in the garden. JoyC.

**12th September** At the Lurgies, Montrose Basin we witnessed some of the earliest **pink-footed geese** (c. 1000) and **gulls** distressed when a **white-tailed sea eagle** flew overhead and along the River South Esk. A late season **osprey** sat on a dead tree in the middle of the Basin. BW.

**13th September** **White-tailed sea eagles** were seen at Easthaven and near Corbie Knowe, Lunan Bay. BMcC.

**15th September** After a summer bereft of butterflies we finally had ten **red admirals** and a **peacock** on the **buddleia**. AR.

**26th September** On a dry sunny day was surprised to find a **great spotted woodpecker** on the feeders in our garden. Then, to make my day, some **long-tailed tits** arrived too. BW.

**29th September** A **great spotted woodpecker**, a **goldfinch** with juvenile feeding on **thistle** heads, eight **tree sparrows** and four **blackbirds** feeding on *Sorbus intermedia* were all present at the top of Kingoodie Quarry. BW.

**7th October** Another **great spotted wood** pecker, male this time, visited our garden. BW.

**14th October** A single **tree sparrow** spent the afternoon at my bird feeders, having put in a brief appearance a couple of days previously. Two days later I saw two of the birds, but none since. This is a garden first, in over 20 years - my surveillance of the ever-present **house sparrows** finally paid off! **Tree sparrows** are known to migrate, at least over short distances, unlike their sedentary cousins who stay put. AR.

**14th October** Somewhat surprisingly, two green **parrots** appeared in the garden and helped themselves from my bird feeders. JS. (Reports of well-established parrots are increasingly common locally. Ed.)

**20th October** At Eden Estuary, Guardbridge watched c. 500 **golden plover** on the mud, three pairs of **red breasted merganser** feeding on **dabs**, **black-tailed godwits** and all the usual characters of this estuary. A **greenshank** showed a remarkable burst of speed running at full tilt for 20 yards in the water with beak dipped to skim insects! BW.

**29th October** A **hedgehog** seen at dusk at the edge of the road close to Idvies House (near Letham) in chilly weather. It was fairly small and perhaps desperate for food. We can only hope that it would be able to hibernate successfully. JC.

**30th October** A **fox** ran up the steep slope of Balgay Hill through the fallen **beech** leaves ten yards from me, in mid-afternoon. BW.

**4th November** A flying **pipistrelle** was reported by the Youngs around Carsgowniemuir Cottage in near freezing conditions. It may be roosting in the hay shed and coming out for the insects around the stables. It, too, must have been desperate for food, perhaps an indication of how poor the weather has been this year for wildlife. JC.

**10th November** A **snow bunting** kept fluttering a few yards ahead of us on the track as we walked up the Carn a'Chlamain in Glen Tilt. BW.

**17th November** 22 **ptarmigan** were counted on Broad Cairn. BMcC.

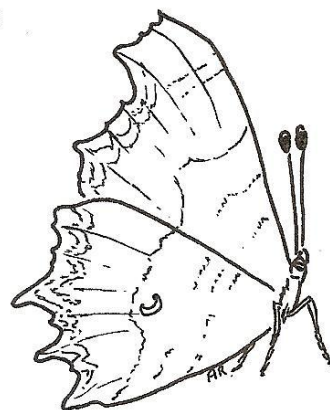
**18th November** At Loch of Kinnordy I saw a **common snipe** in full view for several minutes. Four adult **whooper swans** with two juveniles had flown in, a pair of **goosander**, **teal**, **mallard**, **gadwall**, **goldeneye**, **wigeon** and **tufted duck** all made it feel that winter had arrived. BW.

**21st November** On the Eden Estuary at Outhead point had superb windless conditions on a rising tide to watch **long-tailed duck**, **slavonian grebe**, **red-throated diver**, **goosander**, **red-breasted merganser** and **eider ducks**. BW.

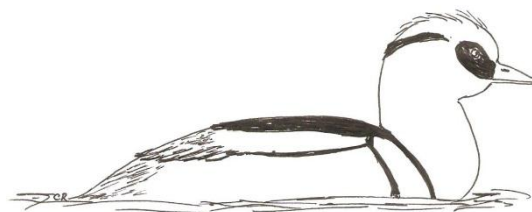
**30th November** About 90 **waxwings** arrived in Adelaide Place (the numbers building from about 30 on 27th November) almost a month earlier than usual to feed on *Sorbus* berries in a neighbour's garden. BW.

**3rd December** My first sighting of a **blackcap** male in our garden, and more than 15 **long-tailed tits** flocked on our feeders. BW.

**9th December** About 40 **waxwings** in the garden. BB.



- 11th December** Went out into the garden where I was joined by 15 or 20 **long-tailed tits**. Amazingly they stayed quite a long time as I stood quietly. They usually fly off fairly quickly. ME.
- 11th December** In the Western Cemetery, Perth Road, I watched about 15 **waxwings**, **fieldfares**, **redwings** and a **mistle thrush** feeding on **yew** berries. BW.
- 12th December** On my way to the Afternoon Lecture I saw a party of **long-tailed tits** flitting noisily around in one of the tall trees behind the University Tower Building. AR.
- 14th December** A female **brambling** arrived with **chaffinches** in our garden. BW.
- 15th December** On a cold but brightly-sunny day a lone **butterfly** was sunning itself high on the house wall. It was too far up to see clearly but I think it was a rather tatty **small tortoiseshell**. Later in the day a large **bluebottle** flew in through an open window. JC.
- 21st December** A lovely male **smew** arrived at Kinnordy. BMcC.
- 25th December** A walk on Christmas Day on Balgay Hill rewarded me with a pair of **jays**, a **great spotted woodpecker**, a **buzzard** guarded a **cotoneaster** tree watching hungry **blackbirds**, and **redwings** and **fieldfares** gorged berries further round the Hill. A pair of **waxwings** made my Christmas treat! BW.
- 25th December** About 20 **waxwings** on **cotoneaster** in the garden and again on 31st. Also saw around 40 **waxwings** on Monifieth Links later in the day. CM.
- 27th December** A walk at Crombie Country Park gave us a good sighting of a **green woodpecker** in one of the less frequented areas on the west side. Also saw around 40 **waxwings** resting in a tree on Grange Road, Monifieth on the way home. AR.



## PSEUDOPLECTANIA NIGRELLA

March 2011 found Jim and I walking the dogs in one of our regular haunts, Ethie Woods, just outside Arbroath off the A92 main road to Montrose. Out in front as ever, with both dogs on their extending leads, Jim led the way which allowed me to loiter along behind on the forest track. This particular path has mixed deciduous trees, particularly **birch**, on the right hand side and conifers on the left. Due to the prolonged and severe winter that year, the substrate remained flatter than normal for that time and the moss was still dormant which caused me to notice four black tiny shapes on the decaying pine needles requiring further close investigation. These appeared to be cup fungi, the like of which I had never seen before. After photographing these from all angles, catching up with Jim and the dogs and completing the remainder of our walk, we returned home where I searched my books to identify these. But without success. Next I tried internet searches, also without success. I showed others, emailed and posted images on the internet, to no avail.

Then came the annual Nats fungal foray in the autumn, which that year was to Methven Woods. One of the leaders, Gordon Maxwell, distributed a leaflet to participants. This was compiled by Plantlife.org.uk and titled "The Wild and Wonderful World of Scottish Fungi". An informative leaflet, it had colour photos of commonly found species, but on the back cover had a section entitled "and some Fungi that you probably won't see", with the subheading that "These species are rare and are listed under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan". Of these four rare species, I was surprised and pleased to see one of the photos, *Pseudoplectania nigrella* or **ebony cups**, resembled the photos I had taken in the woods earlier in the year. At that point, I realised that being a late winter fungus, I was going to have to wait until March 2012 to be able to have identification confirmed, and then only if I found further specimens.

Needless to say, the task of monitoring the path to find the fruiting bodies of this species was not straightforward at all, since I had "plotted" them on the path as being found "after the first fallen tree on the left of the path and before the second". The winter storms had brought yet more trees down at the side of the path and it was difficult to identify which fallen tree was which. Nevertheless, I decided I would just have to study the entire length of the path in that case and commenced mid-February. Searching was also compounded by this winter past having been so mild, as it has caused the substrate to deteriorate more slowly and also encouraged fresh growths of moss. The cups themselves being less than one centimetre in diameter, I was becoming ever more obsessive and

feverish regards finding them as time went on. The poor dogs were being walked along this section of path twice a week at snail's pace.

Then came the mid-March weekend, and Jim out in front with the dogs as usual. We were quite far along the path when he handed me the dog leads and stepped into the conifers, stating he wanted to check out the nibbled cones - looking for left handed squirrels! I waited patiently for him to return, but noticed small black areas on the substrate under one of the trees. I hardly dared look closer, thinking I might be seeing only worm casts and, in any case, we were well past the area of all the fallen trees. To my delight, however, I had indeed spotted more of these winter wonders, twelve tiny single cups plus four conjoined. I was then able to contact Plantlife, who put me in touch with Liz Holden, who requested I send a cup to her for confirmation of identification. Liz enquired what had made me suspect it was *Pseudoplectania nigrella* and was delighted to learn it was the very same leaflet which she herself had helped to compile.

After several days (anxious!) wait, Liz emailed to confirm that the find was indeed *Pseudoplectania nigrella*, common name **ebony cups**, a rare fungus with two confirmed records in England and four in Scotland. Identification was confirmed through spores, paraphyses, time of year and substrate. This record was passed to FRDBI (Fungal Records Database of the British Isles), and NBN (National Biodiversity Network) and put on the Scottish Field Mycology chatroom website.

All in all, a most satisfying outcome.

Stevie Smith

Note: There are photographs of **ebony cups** on page 27. Ed.

## GARDEN FINCHES

At the time of the 2012 RSPB Garden Birdwatch return in January, we had about 11 **goldfinches** regularly in our Monifieth garden and we took great pleasure in watching them at the feeders. However, along came a bunch of "heavies" in the form of about 28 to 30 **linnets** and, amid some big squabbles, these took over the two nyger feeders on the hedge. This carried on for a few days until we noticed a change in the pattern of things and, whoosh, down came a **sparrowhawk**, scooped a **linnet** in mid-flight, took it under the hedge, ate it and left nothing but feathers!

Things have quietened down a bit now (late March) but we still have about half dozen **goldfinches** and eight to ten **linnets**. This is just to keep you in the picture of what's happening in our bit of the woods and the fact we noticed that there has been no mention of linnets in the Bulletin lately.

Stewart and Jean MacKenzie

Apologies for not mentioning linnets recently, it was not an intentional omission! Ed.

## DANCING ON AIR

7th April

Carsegowniemuir Quarry was very calm and quiet with birdsong all around. The air was reasonably warm and all the snow had melted. A pair of **great tits**, presumably territorial males, competed stridently in nearby trees, chasing each other in and out of **oaks** and **rowans**, singing loudly from a favourite perch and then dashing into the neighbour's tree and promptly being chased out again. This entertainment went on for some time, while a couple of **blackbirds** and **robins**, a **dunnock** and a few **chaffinches** either made an appearance or were heard in the vicinity. While digging a hole - not so quietly - several **buzzards** could be heard mewling in the area. Suddenly a curious, soft rushing sound, clearly audible in the almost dead calm conditions, caught my attention. I looked up and there, directly overhead, only a hundred or so metres up, were a pair of **buzzards** with locked talons and spread wings, spiralling rapidly down. They separated only some 30 to 40 metres overhead, but focussed only on each other and paid not the slightest attention to any mere humans below. The pair rapidly gained height and drifted off north towards Finavon Hill, repeating the locked



talons display twice more before circling round to Wilstead's Wood to the south. It was wonderful to see this fascinating breeding display at such close quarters.

Jim Cook

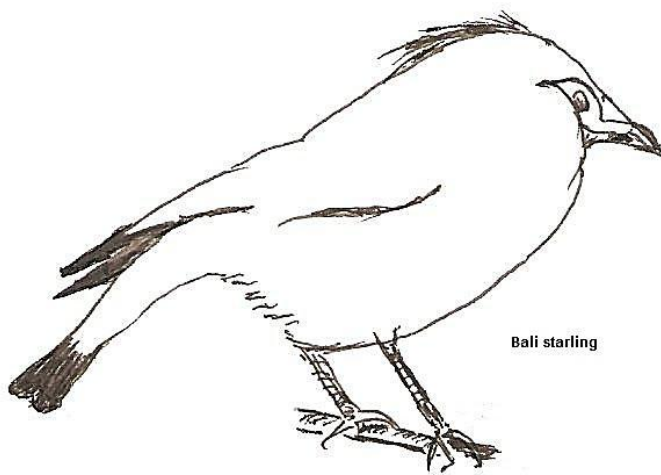
## THE LEN FULLERTON MEMORIAL AVIARY, CAMPERDOWN

28th April

On a fine Saturday morning a small group of volunteers from Camperdown Wildlife Centre, members of Dundee Naturalists' Society, relatives and friends joined my sisters, Clare and Hazel, and me in the Wildlife Park for the opening of the new Len Fullerton Memorial Aviary. The original aviary erected in his name had fallen into disrepair, and sufficient funds had been collected for a completely new building on the same site.

As part of the exchange system of endangered animals and birds within wildlife zoos and centres, it was decided that this new aviary would house a pair of **Bali starlings**. These pristine white birds, with an exotic blue eye flash were to be given pride of place in a new home and run.

The actual building is sturdy looking and incorporates stone carvings of wildlife subjects, originally created by Alf Robertson. Alf was a former keeper at the Zoo and a great enthusiast for nature, his infectious interest well known to the Naturalists' Society (Obituary, Bulletin 34, 2009, page 5).



Thanks to sharp eyes noticing a plea in the Craigie Column for any living relatives, Len's three daughters were all able to attend, from scattered parts of the UK, and admire this wonderful concept. After the ceremonial cutting of the ribbon, we were all taken on a tour of the Wildlife Centre, and shown the results of the successful breeding of some of the other residents.

My sisters and I were extremely impressed by the ongoing work. For this modest artist/naturalist to be remembered in a way he could never have anticipated is indeed a fitting tribute. We are grateful to all those involved and are pleased to learn that, despite everything the Scottish weather has thrown at them, the starlings are thriving and enjoying their own form of luxury.

Leonore Goodliffe

Note: Len Fullerton was a past President of the Nats and very well known locally. Anne Reid was at the opening to represent the Nats and Jean Pollard also attended. Ed.

## SWIFTS IN ANGUS

The first sighting of **swifts** this year was two at Loch of Kinnordy on 10th May. The first over Nursery Road, Broughty Ferry were five on the evening of the 11th, a week later than normal. At midday on the 12th the first screaming party of four was over the nest site in our neighbour's roof and on the 26th May I was lucky enough to witness a pair mating high above the garden. Other than regular screaming parties, there was little to suggest the three nest holes were in use until 16th July when a noisy group of ten birds was at the site with some birds entering and leaving the nest holes. Possibly this was the young birds fledging?

I continued to see and hear parties of up to 12 birds into August, with the last sighting near the house on 18th August, again a week later than last year.

On 31st August looking out of the living room window I thought I saw a distant **swift**. A walk along Nursery road towards Forthill confirmed two **swifts** were feeding with a group of 30 **house martins**, presumably all migrants. Although late, this is by no means the latest for Angus, which was 3rd November 2001.

Jon Cook

## THE CLAIGAN 'CORAL' BEACHES

The short walk from the car park at Claigan, Duirinish on Skye to the Coral Beaches and Lovaig Bay on a sunny, warm, though windy, day in late May was a delight. A **sedge warbler** was singing in the old **birches**, and **bluebells** and **violets** were in flower nearby; **marsh marigolds** were in full splendour by a stream. The path crosses rocky outcrops and meadows grazed by cattle until the pristine white beaches come into view near the headland, giving fine views of Lovaig Bay and across a channel (An Dorneil) to the island of Lampay. A pair of **red-breasted mergansers** swam close to shore and **oystercatchers** called. **Wheatears** flitted around the rocky headland. In the channel were male **eiders**, **black guillemots**, **common guillemots** and **razorbills**. A small colony of **shags** occupied the north end of Lampay and a few **gannets** were cruising past further north. As the tide changed, a fishing party of about 30 **arctic terns** moved in. The grassy steep slopes around the headland, out of reach of cattle, were covered in **primroses** still in bloom.

The 'coral' beaches are composed of the bleached fragments of calcium carbonate derived from the coralline slow-growing red algal species *Lithothamnion corallioides* and *Phyтомatolithon calcareum* that thrive in this area of sea to form **Maërl Beds** that are very important for ocean biodiversity. The pristine beds shelter and provide habitats for about 430 species of animals and plants and have been shown to be important for attachment of juvenile **queen scallops**. Unfortunately, the Maërl Beds are easily damaged by scallop dredging and these algal species are now listed for protection (UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report (Anon., 1995).

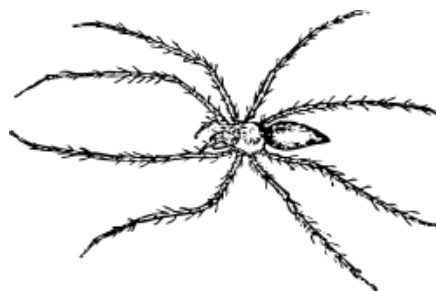
Brian Williamson

## SPIDERS IN THE BATH?

An article by Geoff Oxford in *British Wildlife* magazine (October 2011) summarised the results of research into large house spiders, *Tegenaria* species, in the British Isles. There are eight species, only some of which occur in Scotland, several being very similar and only distinguishable by microscopic examination. Two species, *T. saeva* and *T. gigantea*, have only colonised northern Britain since the mid-20th century. Within their historical range in southern Britain they are reproductively isolated with stable distributions, but in their new territory, where both species occur they hybridise widely, giving important insights into the evolutionary interactions between species.

Dr Oxford is keen to receive specimens of **large house spiders**, particularly from Scotland, which has been poorly sampled. Even if a specimen is not from the *T. saeva/gigantea* group, it is likely to improve knowledge of spider distribution. Spiders should be sent alive, individually packed in non-airtight containers with a little moist (not wet) tissue with full details of location and date, in a jiffy bag. He suggests using half toilet roll tubes closed at both ends, but I've found it easier to use boxes from toothpaste tubes or similar. Dr Oxford will refund postage and give an identification for your spider(s).

Dr Geoff Oxford  
Department of Biology (Area 14)  
University of York  
Wentworth Way  
Heslington  
York  
YO10 5DD



There is a postscript to the above item. I have so far sent Geoff Oxford eight spiders from three different addresses in Perth and Dundee. These have turned out to be of five different species, none of which have been the ones he was appealing for - perhaps they have yet to get established in our area? However, one of the species collected was *Tegenaria atrica* - a very uncommon species in Britain, with just a handful of previous records from Scotland, and only one previously known self-sustaining population, in Newcastle. According to the Provisional Atlas of British spiders (2002), "...specimens are often found in locations such as garden centres and post offices, which suggests recent importation..." Even more remarkably, one specimen was found in Dundee, the other in Perth! It's highly likely that a few spiders have stowed away during my frequent trips between Dundee and Perth, but a mystery how they got here at all, as I have no connections with north-east England. It just goes to show the sort of discoveries that can be made without even venturing as far as our own doorstep!

Colin McLeod

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NORTHERN BROWN ARGUS

About twenty years ago I was quietly confident that I knew my local butterflies. How wrong can you be? On 5th July 1991 I was square bashing for natural history records for the now floundering Naturebase database held at Barrack Street Museum. While walking along the Blacklaw Burn near Redmyre in the Sidlaws I came across what I thought were two or three **small blues**. I almost dismissed them as moths until I noticed their more erratic jerky flight, so I netted one and the next morning proudly presented it to Adam Garside who made the proper identification of **northern brown argus** which, I confess, I had never heard of! So much for my inland colony of Small Blues!

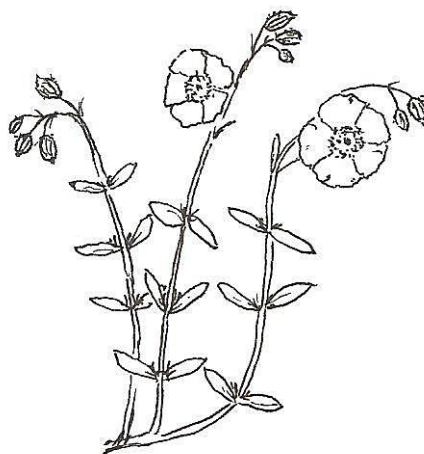
The next time I found them was in 1994 while checking the 10km square NO37 for the orchid atlas. On 16th July while I was working through the marshy hollows among the drumlins between Wheen and Adielinn in Glen Clova I found two or three groups of Northern Brown Argus sheltering in the damp grasses. I now knew that **rockrose** was the food plant and found it to be abundant on the dry hummocks of the adjacent drumlins. The butterflies seemed to prefer the damp grassy areas as was the case at the Blacklaw Burn site.

During the late nineties, while assisting Dave Arthur with his **ring ouzel** studies in Glen Esk, I noticed that the steep slope below Craig Buck on the north side of Loch Lee was festooned with **primroses**, **heath violets**, **dog's mercury** and **rockrose**. Using my recently acquired knowledge of **northern brown argus** I felt that the area would be perfect for this species with the abundance of their food plant and the ideal southerly aspect. But none were to be seen.

On 15th July 2006 - eureka - my prediction was correct! (There have been many that were well off the mark.) While walking on the track along the north shore of Loch Lee to check for any fledged **peregrines** I noticed a small butterfly among the **common blues**, **small pearl-bordered** and **dark green fritillaries**. A closer look revealed the white spot on the forewing to confirm **northern brown argus**. They were frequenting the wet ditch alongside the track. There were singles in two places and two at one site. Further along was another single at the bottom of the cliffs of Hunt Hill. Another visit to Loch Lee on 19th July 2006 produced eight at three sites. Again they were all sheltering in the damp grasses. As far as I am aware these are the first records for this area.

A later visit with David Lampard, to the Wheen and Adielinn area of Glen Clova, on 11th July, 2007 produced ten butterflies between two sites.

Mike Nicoll



## SPARROW WATCH

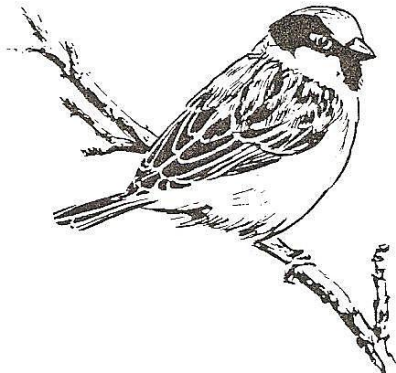
All I need - or want - is a small walled garden, with pea gravel in place of grass and a low maintenance plantation both in the ground and in pots. The maintenance strategy consists of allowing the plant life to burgeon, merge and tangle in a satisfyingly unruly manner, requiring a minimum of effort on my part, while providing both a restful panorama for me and a network of pathways where birds hide and play.

Of birds, there are only a few species, all common to the gardens in our part of the world: **blackbirds**, a **robin**, **blue** and **great tits**, **collared doves**, **jackdaws**, **starlings** and the occasional **goldfinch**. An obese **pigeon** flops in from time to time.

Most numerous and most delightful of all are the **sparrows**. I have had endless pleasure watching them feeding, raising their young, roosting in the **clematis** and **honeysuckle** at my back door. On a glorious late autumn afternoon, some of them are chirruping in the climbers very close to my own perch, and as I relish the sunshine I reflect on their activities and their antics over the months since the end of winter - i.e. early June!

As the days lengthened and the **swallows** returned to my garage (24th April, two nests, four abandoned eggs then one family of five), the nesting routine got under way. I never discovered any sparrows' nests in my garden, but suitable accommodation is plentiful in the mature trees and shrubs all around. My first evidence of family raising was the fledglings lining up, forming an orderly queue at meal times. Over the following days and weeks the parents first fed them, then taught them to come to the food source in the bird feeders where, initially, they formed another orderly queue along the nearby washing line then, watching with mother, they learned to feed themselves. Beaks hardened, fluff grew into feathers, and force of numbers allowed them to do battle with the starlings.

One morning in early summer I was sitting idling at my window when, at the rear of the garden where the **forsythia** lives, there was an explosion of **sparrows** as more than twenty of them emerged from the foliage, chittering furiously at the unwelcome disturbance - whatever it was.



Bathtime is always wonderful to watch. A couple of large planter trays are more often filled with rainwater than not, and I am happy to leave them like that. They are mainly visited by **blackbirds** and **sparrows** for drinking water, but of course they double up as bathtubs. Three **sparrows** will fit comfortably into the space, and the water is deep enough for them to have a proper 'dook' which comprises not just a simple immersion but a vigorous, all-over rinsing of feathers with frequent head shaking and much splashing. Occasionally, one of the **blackbirds** will enjoy a bath with no more than two **sparrows**. The **collared doves** do not share the space.

**Sparrows** seem to behave in a collegiate manner, unlike the **blackbirds** which are as aggressive towards each other as they are with other species. The queuing as the **sparrows** wait their turn at the bird feeders is quite different from the way the **starlings** behave, and I have also seen them roosting in groups.

The south facing wall of the garden is topped with coping stones which slope downwards on each side from the apex. This location provided one of the most hilarious spectacles I witnessed all summer. About two dozen **sparrows** were lined up along the coping stones, each row facing the other. There was much hopping about and a lively exchange of chitterings - for all the world as if these sparrows were attending a meeting! A committee? A forum? Their agenda will remain forever a mystery to me, but I hoped and felt sure that the gathering produced a more satisfactory outcome than many a meeting I have had to attend! Some of these were more like a gathering of **starlings**, snapping and squawking.

The passing year is now marked by another season-end: **geese** are migrating in their thousands; the **swallows** are long departed; guns over the stubble fields announce man's dominion; red berries flourish in the shrubbery. As the mid-afternoon sun dips behind the rooftops the **clematis** and **honeysuckle** are, for the moment, silent. The **sparrows** are simply busy elsewhere.

Entertaining and humbling, miraculous and gratifying, these tiny inhabitants of this man-made corner of the world are endlessly rewarding. And the garage will be ready again, round about 24th April. Joy!

Shelagh Gardiner



## Y' CANNAE MISS IT

"Plants are so much easier to see than birds since they don't fly away" is an oft-heard statement. However, one does need to look in the right place and in the correct season. I've found that when someone gives a general description without the aid of a map the result is often a fruitless search. Any instruction ending with "Y' cannae miss it" means that failure to find the desired species really is assured.

Two rarities, **alpine catchfly** (*Lychnis alpina*, now *Silene suecica*) and *Diapensia lapponica*, found above Glen Doll and Glenfinnan respectively, should present no problems for a hillwalker. Both species are spread over an extensive area of hillside and once you have seen the sites you would say that they would be difficult to miss. Well, I failed to find either of these sites on my first visit, even though I went at the correct time of year in fine weather. Botanical sites were a closely guarded secret then, but now rare plant information is widely available on the internet. Just look up *Diapensia* on Wikipedia and you will find all the information you need to find it.

This year, on a mid-June visit to Teesdale, I researched botanical websites and found 8-figure grid references for **alpine bartsia** (*Bartsia alpina*) and **spring gentian** (*Gentiana verna*). Clutching my GPS I marched to these points and did not find the desired species; desired because I had seen them in foreign climes but not in the UK. The **bartsia** site had been thoroughly munched by cows anyway and next day we discovered that we were too late for the **spring gentian**. The best place to see the **gentian** is in the exclosures (for sheep AND humans) on Cronkley Fell where an English Nature recorder told us that flowering was a month earlier (the website stated the end of June!).

So, a cautionary tale; modern technology is no substitute for a knowledgeable person showing you a species. Nats outings rule OK!

Alban Houghton



Alpine catchfly

## BLESSED BY BULLFINCHES

At the end of April I recorded a single male **bullfinch** in my Monifieth garden, not a bird I usually see. Over 14 years of BTO Garden Birdwatch I had seen one on about three previous occasions, usually fleetingly and on such things as **forget-me-not** seed. This one was different, it knew about feeders instead of fruit trees. It spent a while on the sunflower seed feeder and I counted myself lucky to get a photo, through the window.

Over the next week I saw the male again and, once, accompanied by a female. I was still quite excited at this stage, but as the weeks went on it became clear that the bullfinches were resident and knew that there was a reliable source of food in my garden. It also became clear that there were possibly two pairs around as I sometimes saw two males (or females) and, more rarely, three birds together.

As the summer wore on I saw some display behaviour between a pair, but never had any evidence of nesting and no juveniles appeared. Any nesting attempt would have been severely tested by the very wet summer. The last sighting was in mid August and I now miss my beautiful bullfinches, having seen at least one nearly every day over 16 weeks of the summer.

Anne Reid

Footnote: After a complete absence, a female **bullfinch** appeared on the feeders on Christmas morning and stayed for a short time. Boxing Day saw a pair appear which were tame enough to go no further than the trees while I filled up the feeders and were both straight on to the sunflower seeds as soon as I had finished. They continued to visit until the turn of the year and into January. AR.

## OSPREY AND PEREGRINE LIVEN UP THE EDEN ESTUARY

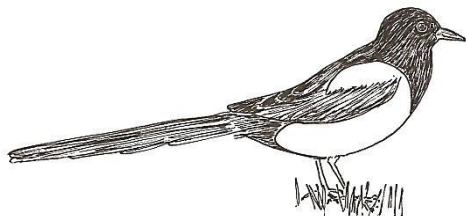
At low tide in mid-summer the Eden Estuary is generally quiet for bird watchers, but sometimes there are surprises. In late July there were the usual **redshanks**, **oystercatchers** and **curlews** probing the mud for tasty morsels, numbers of **black-headed**, **lesser black-backed** and **herring gulls**, in the main channel, but very few **ducks** on show - I only counted half a dozen **shelducks**, when in winter and spring there are hundreds in this tidal basin. For ducks, this is the time of year, after breeding, when they completely change their plumage, thereby going into a state called 'eclipse' and normal adult-patterned plumage changes markedly. In this state they cannot fly to escape predators, such as **foxes**, and often retreat to secluded and isolated spots to moult in safety.

A **peregrine falcon** flew fast up the main channel towards Guardbridge, but did not disturb the **gulls**, **curlews** or about ten **black-tailed godwits** that had returned early to the Estuary still sporting their beautiful russet summer colours. Later that day I noticed to my surprise that an **osprey** was half-immersed in the river Eden taking a lively bath and a good preen of its wings and breast feathers. It walked up the sand bank shaking off the water and flapping its huge wings; then it raised its tail and took to the air. The **osprey** hovered high above the main channel for several minutes, dived to about 50 feet above the water and then plunged and took a fish that it carried away from the basin at high altitude, probably to waiting juveniles.

Brian Williamson

## MAGPIES 2012

The magpie has been a scarce bird in Angus, but in recent years there appears to have been an increase in their numbers. Apart from well-known areas such as Glen Isla (the area between Lintrathen and Balintore) where as many as five have been seen in the past, Forfar Loch with two birds regularly seen, and four this year, and the coastal area between Monifieth and Carnoustie, birds have been seen in Arbroath and Letham Grange. The places mentioned above are where birds, for the most part, can be seen all year.



Last winter ('11-'12) there appeared to be an influx of birds into Dundee. The numbers sighted were notable - four at Dundee University on 18th February, five at Adelaide Place on 26th February, three at Dens Road on 20th February (all 2012). Altogether there were 12 sightings in Dundee, but none over the summer period. There is no way of knowing whether there were just five birds, moving around, or double that figure.

Since the beginning of November there have been three sightings of magpies in Dundee, suggesting that these are visitors, but where from?

Other records noted were one from Glen Moy in March and three from St John's Hospital in March. This is in no way a census of magpies, but it is all suggestive of an increase in Dundee and Angus.

Pat Gaff

Note: Extra records of one bird on the Miley and another near Backmuir Wood were made by Joy Cammack in December. Ed.

## VOLVARIELLA BOMBYCINA

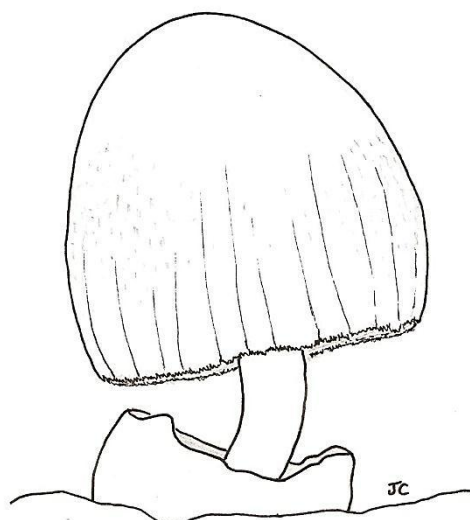
As we all know, I am usually out there looking for rare birds but whilst out on Barry Buddon on July 29th (my local patch) my eye was taken with the sighting of a fungus I had never seen before. I took photos of it and decided I would consult more knowledgeable friends to enlighten me as to exactly what it was. About a week later I met Stevie and Jim Smith on the Lurgies and told them about it. Stevie asked me to forward it onto her, which I did, and she also suggested I send it to Liz

Holden, an authority on fungi, for positive identification. I did as she suggested and imagine my surprise and delight to be told by Liz that my find was a rarity and only the second ever found in Scotland - the last, and first, was found in 1995 at Mellerstain House in the Borders.

I can only say that I am delighted to have been lucky enough to have come across this "Barry Buddon Celebrity" by pure chance when out bird watching! My previous best ever rarity find was a **black winged pratincole** at Monikie Country Park which was only the third ever to be discovered in Scotland. My fungal find goes one better than the **pratincole** - both have given me enormous pleasure.

Bob McCurley

Note: After hearing of Bob's record Jim and Gordon reported having seen it near the Visitor Centre at Templeton Woods some years ago. Ed.



**Volvariella bombycina - Silky rosegill**

## THE LONG VIEW

As a 'Vintage' Dundee Naturalist I have enjoyed many years of informative talks, splendid summer outings and, above all, great company. My tools are a hand lens and a camera but, of late I have been lazy with the latter.

Alas, time takes its toll. My eyes are not so sharp now and my knees are definitely creaky. No more jumping over burns without a second thought. Scrambling up rocks is fine - getting down again is the problem. Likewise, being on hands and knees to get a close-up is not without some hilarity on rising. Roadside verging is to be recommended as everything comes at just the right height.

In August the Nats had a walk around Loch Leven, a lovely day and lots to see, ending at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve. A visit to the shop resulted in my buying a pair of binoculars. A whole new world has opened up; even my garden birds look brighter.

But I keep forgetting the names of things! Has anyone got a remedy for this?

Marjory Tennant

## EASILY OUTWITTED

4th November

Sitting in the quarry hide, I was watching blue tits and great tits competing at the bird feeders that I'd just refilled, when I heard the excited barking of one of the dogs at the far end of the quarry. I glanced along the low ground in the general direction of the kerfuffle and was just in time to see a large and handsome dog **fox** burst out of the **willowherb** by pond two and come running along towards the hide. He was running fast but not panicking and came up the path below me, then took a sharp left right beside the hide, only a metre or two away, lolloped over the high ground and disappeared over in the direction of Wilstead's wood. It was at least three or four minutes later that the dog itself came bounding along, still advertising its excitement loudly, ran up below the hide but lost the scent where the fox had taken a sharp left turn. It took a few minutes of sniffing around to re-find the trail and set off in pursuit again. By this time the fox was well away and the trail must have been nearly cold; the dog soon gave up and returned but still very pleased with itself.

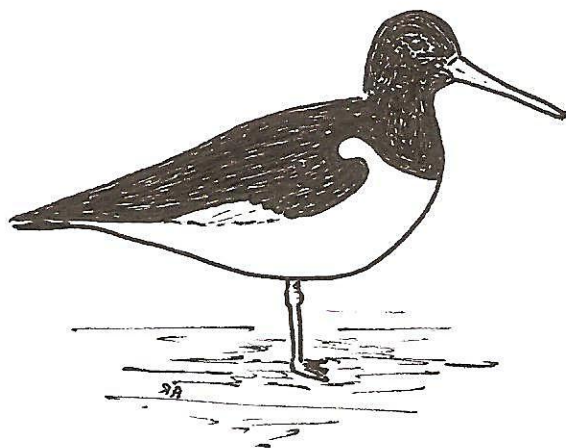
Jim Cook

## RAMBLES WITH STEVIE

Highlights of My Year - 2012

January, and mild conditions prevailed to the point where I had put my moth trap out on Hogmanay. No, I didn't manage to attract any, but it was worth a try. A beautiful multi-coloured **moondog** appeared in a bright evening sky, a type of ice cloud, either a **paraselene** or a **parantiselene** depending on the angle it is seen at. Though I spotted the **scarlet elf cup** fungi early on this month, it was obvious they had shown their fruiting bodies in December, as they were fully formed, but were hidden under piles of leaves blown by the gale force winds. Our Big Garden Birdwatch had a very good result with 14 **long tailed tits**, one **great spotted woodpecker** and a **sparrowhawk** all landing, as well as the more everyday visitors, within the chosen hour. We were dismayed to see the storm devastation at Craigvinean Woods, Dunkeld as well as more locally outside Brechin. Hopefully some fallen trees will be left to provide habitat for insects and fungi.

In February, having lined up on the telegraph wire first, the garden **starlings** numbered 49, one of which imitated the call of a **curlew**. I was certainly taken in the first time I heard it. Much to Jim's amusement, I tend to whisper "oh look it's the **woodpecker**" when she arrives at the feeders. No, I don't know why I whisper as she is not going to hear me through the double glazing. Always alert, she never stays long before she alights on the electricity pole in the garden and makes her way up to the top in tiny jerky hops before flying off. A walk round Loch Muick produced some pretty fruiting **Cladonia lichen** cups, and two firsts of the year, a **fox moth caterpillar** and a male **brindled beauty moth** with fabulous antennae.



By March, the flocks of **oystercatchers** and **curlew** increased dramatically, in the field behind St Vigeans cemetery. The calm reservoir at Crombie had a **cormorant** gliding gracefully along and both **toads** and brightly coloured **frogs** were evident in their breeding finery at the small ponds there. For the first time I heard the yaffling of **green woodpeckers** in Ethie Woods, having seen them previously at Montreathmont Forest and Crombie Park. An outing to the Lurgies at Montrose Basin to see the resident **black swan** also had a queen **red-tailed bumblebee** crawling on the path. She seemed placid enough, so I picked her up and put her on a fence post out of harms way, naturally making the most of the photo opportunity.

April saw Jim, myself and the dogs off to Penzance then the Isles of Scilly for our first jaunt of the year. It's so lovely to go south and enjoy the beginning of Spring, especially the **cherry** trees both wild and cultivated, festooned with frothy flowers, then, two weeks later, to come home and enjoy it all over again. Weather was sunny but windy, which affected the wildlife somewhat, but as ever we made the best of our time away and found some nice specimens to photograph - Jim with his birds and myself with insects and **slime moulds**. We had hoped to find and photograph both **Scilly bees** and a **Scilly shrew**. Though we found a shrew corpse, it was too decayed to photograph, but interesting. Many small **mining bees**, mainly of the *Andrena* genus were spotted, but, unfortunately, no **Scilly bees**. Some cracking rockpooling was also to be had, with enough specimens to keep me happy. On our return home, we were met by a profusion of **primroses** on St Vigeans Nature Trail. Though these had quietly bloomed throughout the mild winter, it was lovely to see them now en masse, interspersed with my favourite flowers, **violets**, reminiscent of my early teenage years and the cheap green perfume I loved - Devon Violets! On 20th April I noted that our first **swallows** of the year had arrived, surely they thought we were to have a summer. That weekend saw us at Balgavies Loch to find that the **ospreys** were already in residence.

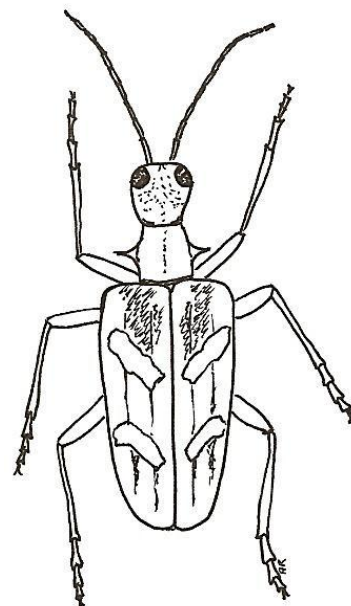
In May, I commenced monitoring for **small blue butterflies** and their food plant, **kidney vetch**, both at Elliot and at Balgavies for the 5 year Biodiversity Action Plan, following a training day at the end of April. A trip to Muirshiel Country Park had me excitedly photographing and reporting a rare and lively *Carabus nitens* beetle, found by Jim. I recognised it having previously seen one as a pinned specimen in Rothesay museum, Isle of Bute on last year's Nats weekend. Naturally, a further highlight this month was the Nats weekend to Fort William and what a fabulous time it was for those



of us who avoided the outbreak of Norovirus. Highlights for myself included a male **orange tip butterfly**, a **large red damsel**, the **rove beetle** *Staphylinus erythropterus* with its rusty red and black colouring and spots of golden hairs, and a very exciting fungus which had been on my "to find" list for some time - **bog beacon**, *Mitrella paludosa*. However, on my return home, I discovered that Jim had visited Balgavies Loch in my absence and captured excellent photos of a **great spotted woodpecker**, a pair of **red squirrels** and a **long eared owl**!! The Bioblitz at Riverside Nature Park produced another exciting first for me, a **tortoise beetle**. A visit to Glenesk offered a nice variety of reptiles and we observed a **stoat** stalking a **vole**, which escaped. Three **cuckoos** lined up together on a power cable and to complete our day, a **redstart** and a **ring ouzel** also posed for the camera. With the end of May came the realisation that the flying **emperor moths** had eluded me for yet another year.

June weather was unseasonably cold and wet and invertebrates were thin on the ground. Butterflies, especially, were few and far between. We returned frequently to Balgavies, hoping to catch up with the **owls**. Even though we didn't, there was always much to see, including the hardy **terrapin**. One evening, **squirrels** at the feeders chased a **blackbird** and another ran up to and sideswiped a nearby **rabbit**. I expect they can afford to have high jinks if their food is so easy to come by. Here we also noted that the **kidney vetch** plantings were now in flower. After an absence of many years, **yellowhammers** returned to our garden. We had a pair, the male of which sang lustily from the top of the hedge. Dogwalking at St. Cyrus, I photographed a **leafcutter bee**, the first one I had seen up here. **Common lizards** were basking on a log and as I tried to balance my camera for a macro shot, one trustingly rested its head on my finger, perhaps it wanted a wee cosy. Suddenly my attention was caught by a **peregrine** chasing a **pigeon** - my heart was in my mouth but my camera was in my pocket. The bird swooped overhead so close I could see the beautiful facial markings. My first sighting of a **common blue butterfly** was on 26th June (last year 2nd June) a lovely very fresh and very blue male at Elliot car park. **Ladies' smock** appeared sparsely and I was disappointed to see only one **orange tip butterfly** locally. In the night garden, a male **ghost swift moth** emerged floppily from its cocoon and matured its wings within an hour. A **Myxomycete slime mould** gave me a little project which involved monitoring it over its 60 hour lifespan. Highlights of Barry Buddon's annual open day included a stunning **sawfly**, *Rhogogaster viridis* and a tiny, beautifully coloured waterside **ground beetle**, *Elaphrus riparius*. Eventually we caught up with the **small blue butterflies** but at Carnoustie, not my monitoring site.

July, though not cold, continued damply and saw the appearance of a profusion of **northern marsh orchids** at St Cyrus and rather unexpectedly, a lovely pair of **grey partridges** basking on the sand in the dunes. A jaunt to the Sidlaw Hills and an improvement to the weather found several **northern brown argus** and **dark green fritillary butterflies** in flight. A sunny day out at Tentsmuir had many spectacular **longhorn beetles** *Rhagium bifasciatum* scuttling over the log piles. A regular walk on St Vigeans Nature Trail found me surprised and somewhat disturbed to note a **slug** rasping away at a dead **mole**. Despite having seen little action so far, the moth trap was duly carted off to Dorset for our 3 weeks camping at an SSSI. Initially the weather did not live up to expectations but we were lucky that we escaped the major flooding which had affected many areas nearby. The cool conditions on arrival were not conducive to any insect presence and we were disappointed especially at the lack of **damsels** and **dragonflies**. However, the following week a short-lived heatwave promoted an explosion of activity, with adults emerging from their larval stage together en masse rather than staggered over time. Butterflies also appeared in greater numbers, but strangely moths remained in extremely short supply. However I was delighted to have



**Rhagium bifasciatum**

found in my trap, a stunning male **leopard moth**, white with black markings and a spectacular pair of antennae. Apparently common, but not often seen, this is a species we do not have in Scotland. A rarity - the **orange footman** - also put in an appearance, so quality rather than quantity was the order of the day. A **purple hairstreak butterfly** came down from the nearby **oak**, to bask on our tent. Needless to say, this was swiftly captured (by Jim, balancing precariously on a flimsy box and egged on by myself!) and transferred, with a small leafy branch, into a swiftly adapted enclosure, a pop up laundry basket, for a photoshoot. Due to the dampness this year, we attracted a different variety of biting flies altogether, a veritable abundance of appreciative blood suckers. The bites and



consequent itching and irritation were exquisite, however, on the positive side many of these have the most glorious iridescent eyes, proving that beauty is ever to be found, even in the tormentor.

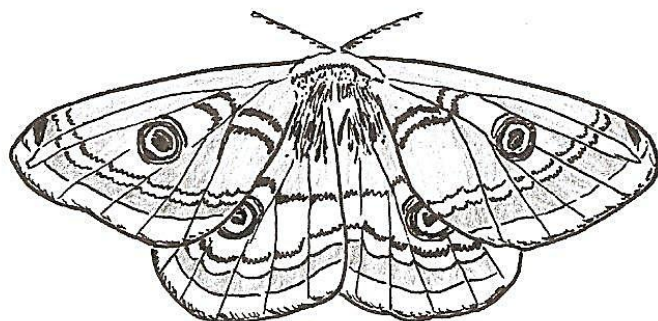
August, still in Dorset, and the camp site owner had promised to inform me when the **long-eared bats** appeared again at their day roost in his boiler house. This did not materialise, but we were somewhat bemused to return from a day's outing to find a carrier bag tied to the outside of our tent with a dead **bat** inside! Said bat was duly examined closely and photographed from an angle which made it look, well not exactly alive, but somewhat less obviously dead! Already, due to the rather wet summer, lovely fungi and short-lived spectacular slime moulds were appearing, including the aptly named **dog vomit mould**. The quiet of the tent and the campsite in general in the evening enabled us to hear not only the expected sounds of the night such as the hooting of hunting **owls** but also the frequent churring of the **nightjars** which are common summer visitors to this area.

September's first outing for us was Fungal Identification at St Cyrus NNR with Liz Holden from Plantlife Scotland. What a superb session on dune fungi - Liz is so knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Knowing the reserve as I do, I hadn't expected any fungal surprises but I was delighted to find **parrot waxcap**, which had been on my wish list for some time and also a **dune stinkhorn**, found by Jim, which was duly excavated with its lilac volva still attached and examined in its entirety, one of the few fungi to have tiny rootlets. The Nats fungal foray was another excellent outing, a large specimen of **orange peel** being my favourite. The end of September saw us off on another jaunt, this time to Spain for welcome sunshine, warm weather hiking and enough exotic invertebrates to keep us content for a while.

October saw me (and the dogs) move in with Mother in Laurencekirk for several spells which meant daily walks round Denlethen Woods, with its numerous **red squirrels** and **roe deer**. A nearby field had a covey of nervous **red-legged partridges**, scuttling away over the newly turned earth. The mixed woodland here often produces a different variety of fungal specimens compared to my favourite Ethie Woods and the **jays** here, too, remain raucous but secretive.

Early November and we startled a migrating **woodcock** at Arbirlot which in turn startled us, unready with the cameras. St Vigeans Nature Trail overlooks a flooded field which is normally marshy and is the local **heronry** along with assorted overwintering birds. But a midday dog walk offered, as well as the usual **mallards**, a tiny diving **dabchick**. How could this be deep enough for diving, but I watched it dive several times. Unfortunately I did not have my binoculars and it was too distant for a photo. Jim and I returned next day, festooned with long lens cameras and binoculars, but to find that the entire surface was frozen over with only several rooks walking gingerly over the ice, stopping to peck at a few embedded morsels. An autumn foray off the path in Ethie Woods, found me crunching through the crisp copper carpet to investigate an old fallen **beech** tree, where I found such fungal riches, I made a lovely photo collage. The last day of November, a walk at St Vigeans Nature Trail led me to check for the **scarlet elf cups**, seen previously in January. Having found them somewhat past their best back then, I was delighted to find new tiny specimens developing beneath a cloak of fallen **sycamore** leaves.

All too soon, the dark days of December returned again and already we heard the blood curdling screams of **vixens** in heat. They make nightly visits to our garden in the cold weather. I don't actually feed them but they glean what has fallen from the bird table. Driving towards Brechin I



passed a field with two **buzzards**, wings outstretched, facing each other up. Suddenly they separated and I found myself with one flying parallel right beside the car for fifty yards or so. What a thrill! A wet weather walk in the woods at Ethie at the end of the year produced a stunning display of dripping **lichens** draped over **birch** branches. As ever, I have already commenced entries, outings and jaunts in the new diary with much to look forward to in the coming

year. Hopes for 2013 include **bracken club** and **bird's nest fungus** and, surely, this must be the year I finally catch up with some **emperor moths** in May! (Please may I come with you? I, too, have never seen one. Ed.)

Stevie Smith

## FILLING THE GAPS

### BIRD REPORTS

Are your bookshelves groaning with old local (or even non-local) bird reports that you never refer to? There are two major ornithological reference libraries that might welcome them to fill gaps in their collections, namely the Scottish Ornithologists' Club George Waterston Library at Aberlady, and the British Trust for Ornithology's Chris Mead Library at Thetford.

The BTO makes it very easy to see if your reports are needed, by providing a downloadable list of *missing* bird reports on its website [www.bto.org/library/library-catalogue](http://www.bto.org/library/library-catalogue). For example, at the time of writing, we can see that their coverage of Angus & Dundee Bird Reports is very patchy.

The SOC provides a downloadable catalogue of periodicals *held* in its library, including bird reports, from its website [www.the-soc.org.uk/library.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/library.htm), but does not make it quite so easy to identify gaps. However, any duplicates which they receive will be sold to raise funds through their excellent secondhand bookstall.

### SOC TAYSIDE NEWSLETTERS

Do you have old copies of Scottish Ornithologists' Club Dundee/Tayside branch newsletters gathering dust? If so, you might be able to fill gaps in the SOC's own archives. The Branch started to produce newsletters for distribution at its monthly winter meetings around 1976, and continued to issue them regularly until the 1990s, with occasional issues into the 2000s. Much like the Nats Bulletins, they contain a valuable record of Branch activities and wildlife sightings. However, only an incomplete collection is held by the SOC Library. I am happy to scan or photocopy any that are found, so original copies can be returned to their owners.

Colin McLeod

## SUMMARY REPORT OF QUARRY AND HIDE RECORDS

Since the hide was first put up in Carsegowriemuir Quarry in July this past year, we have maintained a recording system in the hide. A small folder with suitable notepaper and a supply of pens and pencils was kindly donated by Dorothy Fyffe for this purpose. Visitors to the hide have written short notes on the wildlife seen, not only from the hide itself but inside the quarry as well, together with the date, their name(s) and the weather conditions.

These notes have allowed us, already, to pick out a pattern of frequent sightings, something which we have been unable to gather in the past. In the summer weather, as might be expected, the birds seen (and heard) comprised a mixture of local species and welcome summer visitors, such as **swallows** and **swifts**, **warblers** and several others. Typical local species included **blackbirds**, **robins**, **wrens**, **chaffinches**, **yellowhammers** and others. There have been, however, several notable sightings. Bob McCurley recorded two **stock doves** flying over, the first time the species had been seen there. Later in the year Jim saw a **cormorant** flying over very low and then the next week Anne Reid recorded one on pond 5, another first. Earlier, in August and September, Anne had recorded **emerald damselflies**, another new record, and then a **black darter dragonfly**. She also found several interesting moths and butterflies, excellent records. What will turn up next year? Why not come along and see (and record) for yourself?

Jim Cook



## NEW RECORDING SCHEMES

When the first provisional GB atlases of mammals and reptiles and amphibians were published in the early 1970s, the distribution maps of even common and widespread species had embarrassingly large gaps in our own area. By the time Richard Brinklow wrote an article on amphibians and reptiles in Angus for the 1997 DNS *Bulletin*, coverage at 10km scale had improved considerably, but the more detailed tetrad maps of the county revealed how patchy recording still was.

One impediment to recording has been knowing what to do with records - most parts of Scotland do not have an active biological records centre, and even where one exists, people may not know where to send their observations. That is no longer a problem, at least for mammals, reptiles and amphibians - records from any part of Britain can now be submitted online.

The Mammal Society is collecting records for a new national mammal atlas, and is appealing for records of all species from 2000 – 2015 (older records can be submitted, but won't be mapped in the atlas). The online recording form, managed by Biological Records Centre, can be found at [www.brc.ac.uk/mammals/recording.php](http://www.brc.ac.uk/mammals/recording.php). Meanwhile, Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG UK) has launched their own online recording form [www.arguk.org/recording](http://www.arguk.org/recording).

The online forms for these schemes still seem rather 'clunky', especially to anyone familiar with the various bird recording schemes run by BTO (which have benefited from many years of development and testing), but they mean that there is now no excuse for not reporting wildlife sightings, even things you've spotted while on holiday. Records from both schemes will appear in due course on the NBN Gateway <http://data.nbn.org.uk>.

Colin McLeod

