

Dundee Naturalists' Society

Instituted 1874



Bulletin No 40 2015

DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

ANNUAL BULLETIN No 40

2015

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The new Bulletin cover illustration is by Shelagh Gardiner and shows the Society's emblem, the dwarf cornel. Other illustrations are by Anne Reid, Jim Cook, Brian Allan, Margaret Palin, Christine Reid, Mary Reid, Jenny Allan and Artfile. Two pages of colour photographs have been included this year. All other, unacknowledged photographs are by Anne Reid.

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. Thanks to Colin Reid, Jim Cook, and Mary Reid for proof reading and helpful comments.

Contributions for the next Bulletin, articles, line drawings and photos, are always welcome and may be submitted at any time during the year. The deadline for submissions is usually the end of the calendar year.

Our website is www.dundeenats.org.uk . Facebook page: Dundee Naturalists' Society

Anne Reid

SOCIETY REPORTS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well I've made it; this is two years served of my second spell as President. As I said last year I could not have carried it off without the support of the many friends I have made during the 45 years I have been a member of the Dundee Nats.

I would like to thank all members of Council who plan and lead our Summer Weekends and Excursions and bring to the Society ideas and suggestions for our Winter Syllabus speakers. Our dedicated hard working Secretary, Lorna Ward, keeps me on the straight and narrow, reminding me of things my brain fails to retain. Our excellent Treasurer, Dorothy Fyffe, always has the accounts up to date and ready for scrutiny. These positions are key to the smooth running of our Society. I also have two Vice Presidents to thank, now that Barry Caudwell has joined Council, and I know I can rely on David Lampard and Barry to step in when I am unable to attend, whether due to illness, or more likely when I am off on my many travels. Also, thanks are due to past President Anne Reid, our Bulletin Editor, who puts in a power of work, to produce a wonderful professional Bulletin, now with many colour illustrations. Anne also makes sure all our membership mailings are processed smoothly. Thanks also to all those Members who contributed articles, write-ups, photographs and illustrations.

Our long serving Treasurer, Dorothy, has for many years been ably managing our accounts, and she deserves my special thanks. She will retire as treasurer at this AGM, as we have at last found a replacement. However, this is for one year only so please, if you feel you might take on the job as Treasurer, contact any member of Council, who will arrange for a chat about what is involved.

A special mention must also go to Jim Cook, for his continued commitment to our reserve at Carsegowniemuir. This has been displayed during 2015 by the publication of the definitive record of 25 years of stewardship of our reserve at Carsegowniemuir. He is now working towards the 30th anniversary celebrations in 2016. The work that Jim has put into this project has been immense and I congratulate him for this herculean task. Now that he has more time on his hands, he will move on to the definitive 'History of the Dundee Naturalists' Society'!!

This year has again been outstanding, with an excellent range of winter lectures, on many interesting and diverse topics, as you will see in the coming pages. It was good to see so many new faces at our excellent new venue for our winter meetings. The summer outings member participation is again up on last year, and it was good to see so many new members and friends attending. Thanks to Davie Stein, our Excursion Secretary for his continued commitment and support. The Kim Eberst Memorial Photographic Competition was again well supported with a record 17 entries, giving a wide range of excellent wildlife images. We have published this year's winning entry by Barry Farquharson in this Bulletin.

Our dedicated Facebook page has continued to attract more 'members and friends', and I would urge those who have not already joined us to sign up. This can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/dundeenaturalists/> The Nats' site is secure with only members vetted by us able to access it, so don't feel your privacy would in any way be compromised. Please contact Secretary Lorna, who will ensure you are safely added to the Nats' section. For those who are not yet registered with Facebook, this is a simple procedure and is free. Every week we see many photo images posted on our Facebook site of a very high standard that illustrates the massive talent base we have in our Society.

Our dedicated internet website contains information about our current programmes and other activities. An archive of past Nats Bulletins can also be accessed here. As I write, we have plans to completely update the website and at present a small sub-group from Council are gathering ideas and suggestions that can be included in the new website. If you have any suggestions you think would enhance the site please contact Lorna, David or Colin McLeod. <http://www.dundeenats.org.uk/>

Since we keep the Society fresh, by having members elected democratically on to Council for three year spells, I would ask anybody who feels they would like to get more involved in the running of our Society to contact any current member of Council. We are still actively looking for a new Treasurer. So if you can help please let us know.

Before I sign off, I again thank you, the Membership, who after all are the Dundee Naturalists. Without you there would be no Society, so thank you all very much for coming to our outings and meetings, bringing food to eat at our special meetings, and bringing fellowship and friendship to us all.

Brian Allan

CARSEGOWNIEMUIR QUARRY REPORT

It's been a very busy year, in an attempt to catch up on all the much-delayed activities and cope with the usual urgent tasks. In January a gale blew down a large old **rowan** above the main path near the cottage end of the quarry. Fortunately, it fell at an angle to the path and didn't block it so that only a small amount of clearance was needed for some of the longer small branches to prevent any later problems. In early February another gale brought down the last third of the old **rowan** wracked by fungus (**shaggy scale-top**, *Pholiota squarrosa*) and this time it completely blocked one of the back paths as the first third of the trunk had done, forcing a detour. A lot of hand sawing and, later, Ronnie Young's use of his chain saw, cleared the large branches blocking the path. The rest of the tree's remains will be left, like the others, to decay and encourage the growth of fungi and a varied selection (we hope) of other wood-decay organisms.

Ronnie also put in a bird table close to the path below the hide and has been filling the feeders regularly. It's become a magnet for numerous **coal** and **great tits**, especially, but also numbers of **blue tits** and **chaffinches**, small numbers of **tree sparrows** and the occasional **goldfinch** and even **great spotted woodpeckers** (two of which, at least, now seem to frequent the quarry) and, on the ground underneath, **robins**, **dunnocks**, **blackbirds**, **pheasants** and, on one occasion, a pair of **red-legged partridges** - a new species for the quarry. Another new record was a **magpie** in a tree near the feeders.

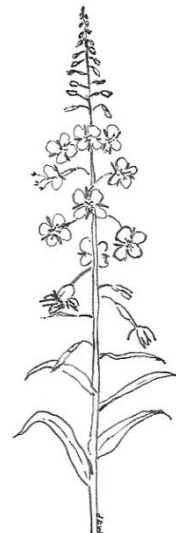
Tree planting began in the better weather in April and totalled 30 specimens. Ronnie Ogg came along several times to help and did a power of work. The young trees included two **hazels** and two **hawthorns** planted in the **willowherb** above the path leading up to the hide, one **birch**, four **damsons** (donated by Ronnie Young) which were planted above the near end of pond 3, ten **oaks** planted mostly along the southern edge of the quarry and 11 **hollies** scattered throughout in suitable sheltered locations. No **ash** saplings were planted this year, although a number of good specimens stood ready in the garden.

Also in April, Theo Loizou was good enough to come along for a visit to record the **mosses** and **liverworts**. I'd already sent him information about the habitats of the quarry and the list of species previously recorded - a total of 20. He thought it would take an hour or two and be finished by lunch time but in fact we spent all day going through the four and half hectares of the quarry in detail. In the end he was able to more than double the list, with an amazing total of 50 species. It just shows what a specialist and real expert can do!

In May and June Ronnie Ogg came along on several occasions to help finish the 'wildlife wall' - at long last - and improve the access path from behind the hide by helping to dig a trench through the raised ground. We also dug in two large branches upright on the plateau in full view from the hide to act as perching poles, we hope, for **hawks**, **buzzards** and **owls**. A short while later the old washbasin, that had lain beside the main path ever since the Nats first started at the quarry, was moved with considerable effort and dug into a large hole to leave the top level with the grass. It was sited close to the perching pole nearest the hide and partly filled with large stones to prevent small animals falling in and drowning. With any luck, it will attract bathing birds and provide a source of water for animals large and small in dry weather.

Really bad news, though, came in late May and June when, as the **ash** trees came into leaf, it became apparent that several of the saplings planted in the last few years were either dead or dying. It was the first appearance of **ash die-back disease** (*Chalara fraxinea*), that we've all been dreading ever since the initial reporting of it in central Angus last year. Several of the affected planted trees were removed and destroyed. Others were too large to remove. I'd been keeping a careful eye open for it since last autumn but the disease is very difficult to pick out when all the leaves are dying back and falling off anyway.

In July the **rosebay willowherb** grew strongly, as usual, and later in the month the brasher was used to clear, over two full man-days of effort, the complete path network to a minimum width of three to four metres along the main path and at least two metres along all back and cross paths. As a further improvement this year two paths, with two diagonal cross paths, were cut across the thick tall growths of grass on the plateau. This was done to allow walkers to cross the plateau without getting wet trousers even in pouring rain. The clumps of long leaves and stalks of the **tufted hair-grass** in the hollow between ponds 2 and 3 were cut as well, to clear the ground for the barbecue later in August. (Report on page 19. Ed.)

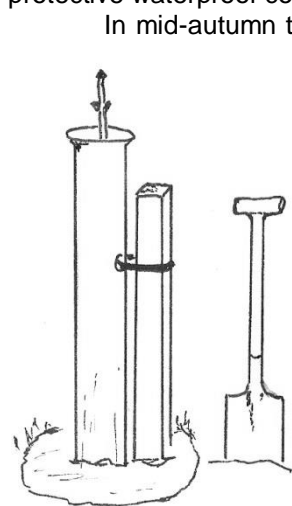


During the summer, after consultations and careful consideration, two new species of locally-native herbaceous plants were introduced to the quarry, namely **water mint** (*Mentha aquatica*) at the edge of pond 2 and **bog-bean** (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) into pond 5, both of which were obtained from a pond at Dundee College. They will be monitored carefully over the next few years. Introductions of several other species of similar plants are being considered as well into the ponds and marshes, in the **sycamore** wood and in the developing woodlands, especially towards the far western end. The aim is, as always, to help increase the diversity of plants - and in turn other forms of wildlife - in the quarry and perhaps, eventually, the surrounding area.

Later in the summer a number of individual improvements to the paths were made, to enable safer and much easier walking for members and, incidentally, to make it easier to strim the edges to keep them clear. Three large slabs of flat rock, far too heavy to lift, were incorporated into the main steps, replacing some smaller slabs. This should make the steps easier and safer for members to use. Shortly afterwards, in very muddy conditions, Ronnie Ogg helped to rebuild and considerably improve the steps on back path one.

He also helped, over four separate visits, to flatten and re-grade the large mound along back path three, to finish the filling in of the steep-sided hollow at the far end of the same path and to smooth out and reduce the steepness of two other awkward 'steps' along the paths. At the same time a number of protruding stones along the paths were dug out and removed, to make it easier to strim and also safer for members to walk along. Yet another task was to improve the path over the dumped stones on the main path. Two years previously, we'd laid down layers of hay (donated by Ronnie Young) and seeded it with a lawn grass mix but the dried leaves decomposed and disappeared into the stones before the grasses had taken a firm hold. In the latter part of this year numbers of turfs were cut and laid down in a line over the stones to the thin grassy patch in the middle, in the hope that it will eventually form a firm smooth and grassy path over the roughness. Ronnie Ogg was able to bring several car-loads of strong barley straw for the other half of the path and this will be thickened in the spring and seeded with more grass. Finally, the rather narrow path leading in to the back of the hide was widened and the spare turf sods used to complete the turf wall to the north of the hide.

At the end of the summer picnic and barbecue season, our President Brian Allan followed up on the Nats' Council's suggestion of acquiring picnic tables for the quarry and (after consultation with the Youngs) bought two at a very competitive reduced rate. This winter they are being stored as flat packs in Brian's garage. They will be taken up to the quarry at a convenient time next spring, assembled and painted with wood preservative - volunteers, please! They will be kept there, under protective waterproof covers, for future barbecue diners.



In mid-autumn the hide itself was repainted with the green wood-preserving mixture - just in time, as it turned out, before the monsoon started! Unfortunately, at the start of the autumnal wet spell, several large 'calves' - not yet full-grown cattle but still fair-sized beasts - managed to penetrate through the fence along the south boundary (normally perfectly stock-proof) when the Youngs were away for a long weekend. The four or five animals really churned up the paths, their weight breaking through the turf crust and pushing deep into the soft wet soil below. At least they did graze and flatten a lot of the long grass on the plateau and elsewhere in the quarry; it's a pity that they didn't do the same to our still abundant **willowherb** growths! Fortunately, none fell into any of the ponds. We had to spend quite some time trying to repair the damage, flattening churned-up stretches, filling in the worst holes and placing lines of flat stones along the muddier stretches. The paths won't recover fully, though, until the grass starts to re-grow and a spell of drier weather comes along, perhaps next spring if we're lucky.

During the wet spell in November (when the main path between ponds 2 and 3 was flooded) a total of eight young **oak** trees and a single small **hazel** were planted in among dense clumps of **rosebay willowherb** around the hide, in the mid area and along the south side of the quarry. One **holly** was planted further on among the birches towards the west end. The general aim is that, in 15 to 20 years' time, the **oaks** will be spreading their canopies and gradually suppressing the growth of the willowherb around them while the **hazel** joins the others on the bank above the sloping path near the hide in shading out yet more of the willowherb. The hollies (next spring others are to be planted to join the lone specimen) will help increase wind resistance, shelter and food supply among the thinning birches and lengthening pine trunks towards the west end. Finally, during the last quarry visit in early December, some **honeysuckle** (*Lonicera periclymenum*) was re-introduced to the quarry. Four rooted lengths were planted at the bases of four large and mature trees and protected by wire and stones. The last

noteworthy item is that this year, not counting the introduced plants, the grand total for species recorded in the quarry topped 700 for the first time.

In December, as many will know already, the 25-year Quarry Report (1986 - 2011), after numerous changes, edits, re-edits and other improvements, was finally completed. This was passed out to the members who'd ordered a copy and four copies were distributed to local archives: to the McManus Museum, University of Dundee, Central Library and Angus Archive at Restenneth. Two more were presented: one to the owners, Ronnie and Loraine Young, and the other sent out to Margaret Duncan in New Zealand.

Jim Cook

TECHNICAL CONVENOR'S REPORT

Over the last season members took part in a number of activities and events relating to recording and surveying. There was a good attendance at the Tayside recorders' forum meeting on 28th February, held at Camperdown Park. The 2016 meeting will be held in Perth on 7th May.

Members took part and helped with the Countryside Rangers' Bioblitz event at Trottick in May, and others took part in a moth trapping survey in Corrie Fee in July and braved legions of midges to record several species for the first time.

The Society organised a Bioblitz at Balgavies Loch over the weekend of 18th July with the SWT. Despite atrocious weather we recorded plants, mammals, including bats, and a variety of moths, butterflies, caddis flies, damselflies, a water scorpion and other insects.

Two official outings were made jointly with the Botanical Society of Scotland as part of the Urban flora project; at the Western Cemetery and the Grassy Beach, Stannergate. Good turn-outs contributed a number of records to the scheme. Two other outings unofficially contributed to this survey - the evening outing to Dundee Law in August, and a survey of the bryophytes in the Howff with David Chamberlain, following on from his lecture. These events turned into identification workshops, particularly the joint meetings with the BSS.

Members were encouraged to make biological records on the annual Barry Buddon outing and despite some access problems several members completed record sheets. Moth trapping recorded over 30 species of moths on Barry Buddon, and members were also involved with a National Moth Night event at Scotia Seeds near Brechin.

Members of the society were involved with the setting up of a Tayside and Fife fungus recording group.

David Lampard

OBITUARIES

ELLA GRACIE

Miss Ella Gracie died peacefully on 10th May, 2015 after a long and busy life, aged 96 years. Ella served with Queen Alexandra's Nursing Corps, ending her career in nursing as a Sister in Dundee Royal Infirmary.

She was a keen participant in the Naturalists' activities, a great organiser and tireless fundraiser with lots of baking and marmalade making in her retirement, and highly regarded by all.

Dorothy Fyffe

EDNA SLIDDERS

Edna, who died on 27th June 2015 aged 97 years, was a long-term member of the Dundee Naturalists' Society. A keen hillwalker, she, with her friends, would go walk-about for a few days, using Hostels and the like, and taking pleasure in the natural wild life, especially birds and flowers.

In later life, with failing eyesight, she still attended Nats meetings and walks until these became too difficult. Always independent, she enjoyed her love of music, meeting people and talking and so remained active all her life.

Marjory Tennant

WINTER MEETINGS EASTHAVEN

2nd January

A few wintry showers and a biting wind did not deter nearly 20 well-wrapped-up Nats from participating enthusiastically in our New Year walk and barbecue at Easthaven.

New Year's greetings were accompanied by tots of hot mulled wine and a selection of home baking. Then everyone set off to collect as many different shells as they could find, list as many different bird species as they could identify, and note any wild flowers still flowering. On the final 'tally' of shells, Ronnie's huge **lobster** claw took pride of place (photo below). Stevie found the one and only tiny **cowrie shell**. The bird species numbered more than twenty, including sightings of **buzzard**, **kestrel**, **heron** and **grey wagtail**, and four or five 'blooming' wild flowers were found. David Lampard photographed a fish, washed up on the shore, which he identified as a **cuckoo ray**, not often found on the East coast (see below).

Anne Reid, in charge of setting up and lighting the barbecue, (thanks Anne), was delighted to find a canopied paved area had recently been installed behind the toilet block, complete with some wildlife identification boards. This provided a cosy, rain-free place for the Nats to cook and eat their food.

Jenny Allan



Photograph Brian Allan



Photograph David Lampard

A TALE OF TWO PENGUINS

Matthew Jarron - 13th January

Sadly our speaker on The Earth, the Sun and Upper Atmosphere had to cancel, so we were treated to an excellent talk on the two **penguins** in the D'Arcy Thomson museum by Matthew Jarron. His talk covered the history of an **emperor penguin** and a **king penguin** in the museum, and their journeys to Dundee. Both had been bought back following exploration trips to the Antarctic, and although they probably did not arise from the Shackleton trip they did involve members of the crew, in particular Alistair Forbes Mackay, who was the surgeon-naturalist on the journey, and had been a pupil of D'Arcy Thomson.

We in the 21st century are used to TV documentaries that look into the minute detail of animals' lives, but how exciting it must have been for people to see the examples of penguins and other animals that were bought back from the exploration trips.

Our thanks to Matthew for stepping in at short notice and entertaining us for the evening.

Lorna Ward

MEMBERS' NIGHT

29th January

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

Photographic Competition 2014

The subject for the competition for 2014 was 'My Favourite Natural History Photograph' and this attracted 13 entries from members. In order of receipt, these were:

Daphne Macfarlane Smith: Golden Globe (globeflower)

Brian Allan: Dog Rose

Jon Cook: Stonechat

Bob McCurley: *Halimium halimifolium*

Jim Cook: *Geranium pratense*

Alban Houghton: Red-spot Bluethroat

Joy Cammack: Curlew and Redshanks

Jack Moody: *Thlaspi rotundifolium*

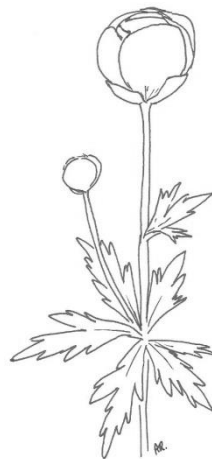
Colin Reid: Just Chillin' in Chile (sealion and dog)

Anne Reid: Keep Off! (sparrowhawk)

Davie Stein: Young Robin

Jim Smith: Dance of the Adders

Stevie Smith: Freckle (adder)



The competition was judged by local photographer Ken Drysdale and Lorna Ward, from the Nats Council, with all administration done by Brian Allan. These three must all be thanked for contributing to the success of this fourth year of the competition, as must all the members who submitted entries. Though not able to be present at the meeting, Ken said that the standard was very high and that the choice for second and third places was extremely difficult, which resulted in an additional award of 'Highly Commended'.

The winner was Stevie Smith, with her close-up photograph of an adder, and she was presented with the Kim Eberst Memorial Trophy and a certificate by Brian. (Photograph printed in 2014 Bulletin.) Second, third and Highly Commended were Anne Reid, Brian Allan and Davie Stein, respectively, who were all presented with certificates.

We then moved on to the compilation of members' photos which Brian had put together for the main part of the evening. Slides shown included:

Bob McCurley - Natural variety is the Spice of Life. Group photos of participants in the Barry Buddon open day and ADBC boat trip to the Bell Rock. Birds, including **peregrine**, **stonechat**, **kingfisher** and **common sandpiper** plus the Kinnordy **bittern** which appears there most winters. Barry Buddon records of **emperor moth** (the most photographed moth ever trapped! Ed.), **small blue butterfly** and **green hairstreak butterfly**.

Alban Houghton - Cul Mor and more. The stunning mountain scenery of the far north-west Highlands on a successful quest for the rare *Artemisia norvegica*. **Cloudberry** and **dwarf cornel** in Lapland, then **grass of Parnassus**, **twayblades** and *Dactylorhiza traunsteineri* (identified by Brian Allan) near Durness. He finished with a **comma** butterfly at Balgavies.

Brian Allan - Sicily, Island of Delights. A view of Mount Etna followed by a selection of the plants seen which were mostly **orchids** but also included *Viola aetnensis*, *Paeonia russii* and *Tulipa sylvestris*. (Full details in article on page 45 of 2014 Bulletin. Ed.)

Marjorie Gillan - Fun at the Commonwealth Games. A shot (in uniform!) to prove that Marjorie and Anne Reid were volunteers at the Barry Buddon shooting venue at the Games.

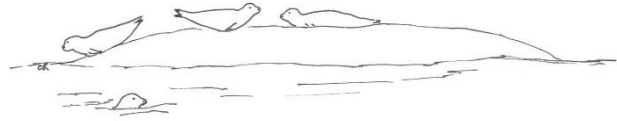
Anne Reid - A Late Lunch. A sequence of photographs of a female **sparrowhawk** eating a **woodpigeon** in all its gory detail. Taken through the window over an hour early one afternoon in October.

Clare Reaney - Turkey Highlights. A trip to the north-east of Turkey to see the mountain flora in the almost Alp-like Kachkar Mountains which rise to 4,000m to the south of the Black Sea. Notable were the hay meadows with plentiful flowers, and the beehives on platforms out of reach of the local **bears**. The roads were 'interesting' in places and **tea** was seen growing on the slopes.

Davie Stein - Birds and Beasts 2014. A miscellany including roosting **oystercatchers**, resting **mallard** and swimming **mute swans** and **Canada geese**. **Goosander** and **roe deer** seen on the

River Earn and a **little egret** at Guardbridge. Perhaps the star of the show was a **great spotted woodpecker** at Balgavies.

Daphne Macfarlane Smith - A Wildlife Medley. **Seals** on Islay, mist on Jura and sun and standing stones on Gigha with a visit to Crarae gardens on the way. Then a selection of views from the top of Dundee Law in the mist with an emergent Cox's Stack and disappearing road bridge.



Jim Smith - Birds, Mammals and Insects. A selection of excellent portraits ranging from an **otter** at Applecross via a **mistle thrush**

on Iona to a juvenile **robin** and **great crested grebes** with young on Forfar Loch. Dorset wildlife included **beautiful demoiselles** and a **hornet** hunting a **hoverfly**.

Stevie Smith - Birds, Mammals, Fungi, Reptiles and Insects. The **hornet** (again) in close up, a selection of beautiful fungus photos including **blue cap** and **parrot wax cap** and **mountain hares** in summer and winter. Multiple shots of **otters** with fish, **corncrakes** (most of us would like to actually see just one. Ed.), selected bees, hoverflies, moths and butterflies and a **red deer** stag yawning and sparring.

Brian Williamson - Uncommon Fungi. A shot of the scarce **sessile earth star** at Dundee Botanic gardens.

The standard of photography seems to improve annually and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the varied selection presented, both close to home and further afield. Brian Allan was thanked for all the effort he put in beforehand and on the night to make a seamless presentation of the numerous images.

Anne Reid

PHOTOGRAPHING WILDLIFE

Ken Drysdale - 10th February

Ken commenced his talk by announcing that for him, photography was an enjoyable hobby. Having said that however, a high quality shone through from the wonderful photos of wildlife to which we were treated.

From the very first stunning shot of a **blue tit**, even before his pictures of **finches** perched on feeders in gardens, **hedgehogs**, **nuthatches** and a delightful photo of a **great spotted woodpecker** near Hawkshead in the Lake District, the audience was won over. He said one of his tips for photographic success was the provision of perches close to feeders, providing somewhere for birds to land in between visits to the feeders. This often allowed a more natural shot, rather than the more manufactured shots of birds on the feeder.

Ken showed us a perky **crested tit** where he had used a 500mm lens, and a beautiful picture of a **dipper** in water with its reflection clearly visible. The latter had been achieved using a narrow aperture and a 'hide' consisting of a draped camouflage groundsheet.

We smiled at **squirrels** outstretched, reaching for the peanut feeder, **bluebell** woods with the sun dappling through the woodland canopy, a mass of blue **cornflower** and a composition of **daisies** and red **poppies** down at RSPB Loch Leven.

He recommended the use of parks for wildlife photography, selection of natural positions and endless amounts of patience to watch and wait for wildlife photograph opportunities.

In addition to the Lake District, his portfolio covered his travels from the Inner Hebrides, to the Bass Rock, the Farne Islands, Montreathmont Forest and Glen Affric.

Liz Olejnik

SOCIAL EVENING

20th February

We once again gathered in the upstairs room at the Invercarse Hotel for our annual get together. This year Brian and Jenny had organised the quizzes and we were instructed to work in

small teams. The organisers ensured a level playing field by ensuring the Society's 'experts' were kept well apart. Sheets with colour photos were handed out for us to identify a wide range of things. We had a good stab at names of Fossils and some of the Artists and Designers were easier than others. Photos of Old Dundee were particularly difficult for the incomers, but some of the native Dundonians had problems too. Science and Natural History Presenters from television proved particularly difficult - we mostly recognised the faces but could not put names to many of them. There were also the usual disagreements such as a friendly dispute about which is the lightest mammal; however, the quiz-setters' word was law.

The break for a buffet supper was very welcome and enjoyed by all giving more opportunity for socialising and chat - the whole point of the evening. Brian and Jenny were warmly thanked for all the effort put in to produce such a well-organised and varied set of quizzes.

Anne Reid and Brian Allan

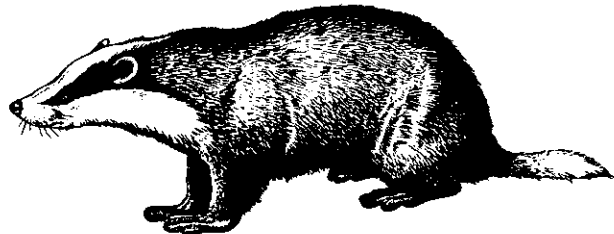
FINDING AND SEEING BADGERS

Dr Chris Sydes - 24th February

When Chris Sydes retired from his post as head of SNH's Species Team a few years ago, he wanted to spend his retirement studying subjects that he *hadn't* worked on during his career. One of these was the **badger**. He joined the Lothians and Borders Mammal Group and became Midlothian co-ordinator for their Badger Group. Although others had already researched badgers in the Lothians, Chris soon found that the population was far larger than previously known, living in good numbers even in some urban fringe and formerly-industrialised areas, and in places where they have been subjected to illegal persecution. The Scottish Badger Distribution Survey 2006–09 found the Borders and Lothians to support the highest density of the species in Scotland.

Part of the lecture focused on the knowledge of badger habits and the fieldcraft required to confirm their presence in an area. Chris has summarised much of this knowledge in a website 'How to read badger' <https://sites.google.com/site/howtoreadbadger1>. Earthworms form the major part of the badger diet, so spotting signs of their foraging in suitable habitat may be the first indication that badgers are present. Where the population density is low, badgers may become lax about territorial marking for at least part of the year, so latrine pits may not be such an obvious indication of badger presence as in more densely populated areas. However, badgers rigorously patrol the boundaries of their territories, and well-worn paths around their territory, as well as routes to feeding areas, can be obvious to the trained eye. Potential 'badger bridges', fallen logs used by badgers to cross watercourses, are a good place to start looking.

The remainder of the evening comprised entertaining 'Badger Cam' video footage, taken either with trail cams or hand-held cameras, showing the animals' activities outside their setts. More than 70 of Chris' videos can be viewed online on YouTube at www.youtube.com/user/csydes. Perhaps it will inspire our own members to try something similar with the Society's trail camera? For reasons unknown, rural badgers in the Lothians emerge late, and at least an hour after Edinburgh's urban badgers, so seeing them involves either a trail cam or a great deal of patience.



Referring to our own territory, Chris remarked that the Braes of the Carse look like ideal badger habitat, and there are certainly records from that area. In recent years the North Tayside Badger Group has found many more setts than had previously been recorded, yet badger density in Perthshire and Angus remains much lower than that for the Lothians. Is there a real difference in populations (and if so, why?), or is the apparent paucity of badgers in Tayside down to a lack of people looking for them? The well-attended talk should certainly have encouraged us to look harder for signs of badgers whenever we are out in the countryside. Although badgers are active year-round, early spring is the best time of year for badger surveying, when peak territorial activity coincides with limited vegetation cover - so why not go searching this weekend?

Colin McLeod

AUCHMITHIE WALK

Saturday 7th March

The dull and windy weather failed to deter the 19 intrepid Nats who arrived for our Auchmithie walk, all suitably wrapped up, with their cameras and binoculars handy. Hot mulled wine was enjoyed, whilst our lunch orders were phoned in advance to the restaurant.

At the start of the round walk, we were cheered by clumps of **snowdrops** and **daffodils** in bud, growing beside the scenic cliff path. The **gorse** was in bloom, and a few early **coltsfoot** and **celandine** flowers were seen in sheltered areas. Viewing points revealed bays, with stormy wave washed sand and pebble beaches, bounded by the impressive cliffs. Nesting **fulmars** and **kittiwakes** were established high on the cliffs, and several **shags** roosted on protruding rocks below. Seaward, we spotted a number of male **eiders** on the water, and a lucky few Nats were rewarded with good views of a small pod of leaping **dolphins**.

The Gaylet Pot is an impressive feature formed when part of the roof of a large cave, formed by persistent wave erosion of a cleft in the sandstone cliff, collapsed inwards. When we visited, high tide was not expected for several hours, but the sight of incoming crashing waves at the base of the 'Pot', fuelled by the strong winds, was still impressive. We disturbed a **fox**, which ran across the ploughed field, and a March **hare** was sighted nearby. **Yellowhammers** and **twite** were numerous, flitting amongst the trees near the village.

Afterwards, an excellent lunch was enjoyed at the nearby Meadowbank Inn.

Jenny Allan



Gaylet Pot

Photograph Stevie Smith

SUMMER OUTINGS

GLASGOW BOTANIC GARDEN

25th April

The day dawned wet and windy in Dundee, but blue skies greeted us when our bus approached Glasgow. Gardens Staff Ranger, Ewen Donaldson, met our party outside the impressive Kibble Palace and took us 'behind the scenes'. Highlights included the nationally important collection of **begonias**, and the very special Filmy Fern House, normally closed to the public.

The Arboretum is reached via a short walk beside the River Kelvin, and is accessed by crossing the Halfpenny Bridge, named after the former toll charged to cross the river. The trees included some impressive species of *Sequoia*, and several young specimens of the rare **Scottish whitebeam**. I looked in vain for the 'living fossil' tree, *Ginkgo biloba*, seen on an earlier Nats visit many years ago, but Jim Cook informed me later the tree was still there, but had lost its leaves and now looked a poor specimen. **Mallard** ducks and a pair of **goosanders** were observed on the river.

The wonderful, recently refurbished Kibble Palace glasshouse, with attendant marble statuary and beautiful **tree ferns** and other tropical plants, never fails to delight. Of particular interest, was a small side area, dedicated to insectivorous plants, including the sinister **Venus fly trap** and many species of **pitcher plants**, **butterworts** and **sundews**. (Colour photographs of Insectivorous plants on page 24) There was plenty to see in the other glasshouses too, including the Palm House, with tropical and temperate species, and sections devoted to **cacti** and **succulents**.

The tearoom, with cream teas on the menu, was a popular final destination for Nats, after having seen and extensively photographed the delights of the Garden. All in all, a wonderful day was enjoyed by everyone. Thanks are due to the Parks and Gardens department of the City of Glasgow, which manages this free attraction, and the hardworking Botanic Garden staff.

Jenny Allan

BALMERINO ABBEY

12th May

To begin with we all walked round Balmerino Abbey grounds enjoying the calmness of the area, the trees, flowers and the wonderful old **sweet chestnut**. The **ramsons (wild garlic)** was in full flower under the trees and we could hear young **starlings** demanding food in a nest in the Abbey ruins. Several **swallows** swooped around us and, though we guessed that they also had a nest nearby, we could not locate it.

One group left to walk a longer loop through the woods towards Birkhill House, while the rest enjoyed a slower walk along the road to the cemetery, which is very old and interesting, and then on to Balmerino. Here we walked down to the shore and followed the path back up the hill to the Abbey.

On the longer walk all the recently-arrived warblers were establishing territories and we heard, though rarely saw, **blackcap**, **chiffchaff**, **willow warbler** and **whitethroat** singing lustily. The **ramsons**, **bluebells** and **red campion** made a wonderful carpet in the wood and **ferns** were unfurling as if to reach for the light.

This, our first evening walk of the season, was much enjoyed by all on a sunny, spring-like evening.

Liz Olejnik



Ramsons at Balmerino Abbey

THE FALLS OF DOCHART AND THE BIRKS OF ABERFELDY

16th May

The scenic drive to Killin took us past **bluebell** woods, starred with **wood anemones** and **primroses**. The trees with new green foliage were admired, as were the impressive mountain vistas. We drove through some heavy rain showers on the journey, but the sun shone for us at the Falls of Dochart. The recent wet weather meant the falls were particularly impressive, with tumbling water torrents cascading over the surrounding rocks.

Below the falls, the bird enthusiasts recorded **dippers** and a **grey wagtail** beside the fast-flowing river. Nearby, the recently restored water mill had an exhibition of artworks and jewellery, and a viewing platform to admire the falls.

The Birks of Aberfeldy is a circular walk of around two and a half miles. The path follows the fast flowing Moness Burn. Initially the path rises gently through predominantly beech woods. On the

East side of the Burn, a life size statue of Robert Burns, sits in permanent contemplation on a seat, where a number of Nats joined him for photos, including 'selfies' with the Bard. Rabbie was inspired by the impressive scenery to write his famous poem "The Birks of Aberfeldy".

"The braes ascend like lofty wa's,
The foaming stream deep-roaring fa's,
O'erhung wi' fragrant spreading shaws,
The Birks of Aberfeldy."

Further on, the valley narrows to a deep steep sided ravine. The impressive vertiginous flights of stone steps and wooden staircases on the East path, were built by the Army Royal Engineers, thankfully with handrails. Waterfalls from feeder burns cascade down on either side of the steep zig-zag path. At the 'top' a footbridge crosses the Moness Burn, high above the Upper Moness Falls, a 25 metre cascading white torrent, swollen by the recent heavy rainfalls.

Beside the path, **bluebells**, **primroses**, **wood anemones** and clumps of **violets**, provided late spring colour. Brian Ballinger assiduously recorded the plants, and patiently shared his knowledge. He pointed out the unusual **goldilocks buttercup**, growing near the start of the walk, and found some last year's spikes of **bird's nest orchids**, near the top of the steep climb. There was no sign of any recent orchid growth. After the walk, the Aberfeldy tearooms were 'invaded' by thirsty Nats. Then it was back on the bus for the return journey via the A9. An excellent day.

Jenny Allan

WESTERN CEMETERY

26th May

This was the first joint outing of the Dundee Naturalists' with the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS) and we were fortunate to have a pleasant dry evening. We met slightly earlier than usual, at 6.30, because the Western Cemetery has a notice to say that the gate will be locked at 8.30pm, although there are doubts as to whether this actually happens.

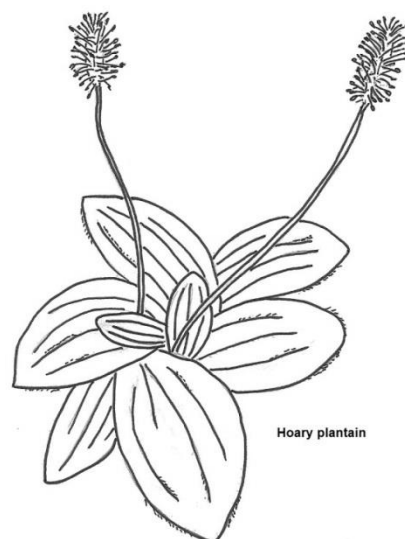
This was mainly a botanical recording outing although some birds were also noted, including **goldfinch**, **greenfinch** and **chaffinch**. The cemetery, although not large, includes parts of three 2x2km squares (tetrads) which are often used as the basis of biological recording. We were collecting information for the BSS Urban Flora of Scotland project, which is just starting as a Citizen Science endeavour. Contributions to this are very welcome from all and information is available on the BSS website or from me. Information will also be passed on for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's 'Atlas 2020'.

Unfortunately the council staff had visited with their grass cutters and weed killers before us, so we were unable to confirm the presence of the locally scarce **hoary plantain** (*Plantago media*) which has been seen here before.

Thale cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) was remarkably common across the site as was **groundsel** (*Senecio vulgaris*). **Speedwells** were a prominent feature and we noted **germander** (*Veronica chamaedrys*), **slender** (*V. filiformis*), **common field** (*V. persica*), **ivy-leaved** (*V. hederifolia*) and **wall** (*V. arvensis*). **Creeping cinquefoil** (*Potentilla reptans*) was seen in the grassy areas, although it was not yet in flower.

The walls in the lower part of the site had been cleaned, but higher up there was a fine profusion of **ivy-leaved toadflax** (*Cymbalaria muralis*). **Wall rue** (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*) was also common on the walls and **maidenhair spleenwort** (*Asplenium trichomanes*) was present. Town walls are important sites for these ferns.

The top part of the cemetery remains relatively wild but there were ominous signs that a clean-up may be on the way with the possible loss of biodiversity. Up here **garlic mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) and **herb bennet** (*Geum urbanum*) were plentiful as well as various tree seedlings.



Altogether we recorded 45 species in the first square (NO3729), 66 in the second (NO3730) and 32 in the third (NO3829). No doubt visits at other times of year would yield further records.

Members were thanked for all their contributions to the evening's visit.

Brian Ballinger

MELROSE WEEKEND

Friday 29th May - Monday 1st June

Friday

On our way to Melrose, we called in at the Butterfly and Insect World near Dalkeith, where members enjoyed getting close to diverse and colourful **butterfly** species in a tropical environment. Some brave Nats also interacted with giant **spiders**, **snakes** and **lizards**. After packed lunches, and a quick look around the nearby Dobbies Garden Centre premises, we continued our journey to the excellent Waverley Castle Hotel in Melrose, arriving late afternoon, allowing plenty of time for participants to unpack and relax before dinner.

Saturday

After breakfast, the bus took us to the start of an upland four mile walk through the Eildon Hills to Melrose. Some mega-fit persons climbed one or both Eildon Hills; others opted to explore some of the other myriad paths in the area, including marked Abbey and St Cuthbert's trails. For the remainder of the day, members were free to choose their own activities, in and around Melrose, including an optional Abbey visit, and/or a well-marked river walk.

Melrose River Walk

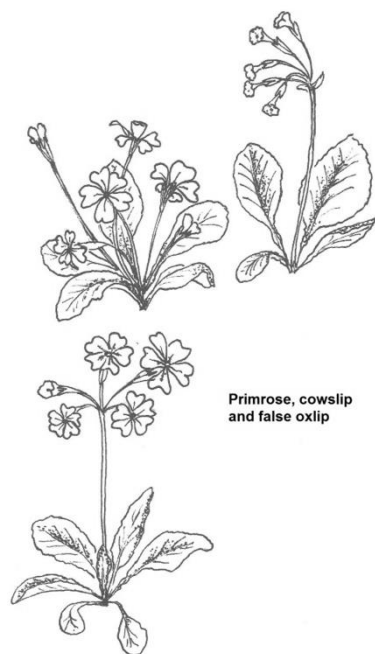
The Southern Upland Way, follows part of the path beside the River Tweed. At Melrose, the path crosses the river via the scenic Chain Bridge, taking walkers north towards Lauder. In May, the river banks displayed a colourful array of wild flowers, including **pink** and **white campion**, purple and white **comfrey**, **lesser** and **greater stitchwort**, **green alkanet**, and yellow **broom**. Within the wooded sections, were **bluebells**, **pink purslane**, **few-flowered leek**, and a few flowers of the distinctive **cuckoo pint**, which has bright red berries in the autumn.

A small but noisy colony of **black-headed gulls** occupied the shingle on the opposite bank. A lone **oystercatcher** was sitting on eggs, or brooding newly hatched chicks, apparently oblivious to the noisy gulls harassing a nearby **heron**, which was a potential threat to the gulls' eggs and young. A few **mallard** pairs with newly hatched ducklings, were a joy to see, as was a colony of very active **sand martins**, established on a steep mud bank beside a small stream tributary. **Swallows** were also spotted, actively catching insects over the river. The Waverley Castle Hotel, has a convenient access to the River Tweed, via a kissing gate beside the path. Tired, but happy, Nats relaxed with afternoon teas or pints, before an excellent dinner.

Sunday

Dawyck Botanic Garden

The cold, wet and blustery weather was forecast to clear up around midday. We enjoyed the scenic drive though the Border hills, to the stunning RBGE gardens at Dawyck, arriving late morning. After hot coffee and (for some), cakes and bacon rolls in the café, we ventured out to explore the Garden, just as the clouds parted to reveal blue sky and sunshine. The late spring had unfortunately delayed the flowering of Dawyck's famous **azaleas**, but the **rhododendrons** were in full flower, as were bright blue **Himalayan poppies**. Carpets of showy pink, white and blue **bluebells** delighted us, but a Dawyck Ranger was not so delighted. As he explained to us, the 'pure' wild **bluebell** strain had become contaminated by DNA from the ubiquitous **Spanish bluebell**, a rampant non-native species. Truly wild **bluebells** are invariably blue. **Primroses** and **cowslips** growing side by side produced a more welcome hybrid, a large clump of **false oxlips** with polyanthus-like sprays of yellow flowers.



Beside the path, we discovered the Cryptogamic Sanctuary Chalet, a helpful information station devoted to **moss**, **liverwort** and **fern** identification, and a charming dell with a waterfall, where **treecreepers**, **dippers** and a **grey wagtail** were spotted. Elsewhere, sightings of **nuthatches**, were reported. Many beautiful photographs were later posted on Facebook for everyone to enjoy.

The Dawyck tea room and gift shop proved popular, before our return journey. Before returning to our hotel we enjoyed a short diversion, to visit the famous Scott's View, overlooking the valley of the River Tweed, reputed to be one of the favourite views of Sir Walter Scott. Before dinner, a few Nats walked the short distance along the path to the Lomond Bridge over the River Tweed. A few impressive **Highland bulls** in a nearby field posed for photographs.

An excellent day was followed by another excellent dinner in the Hotel.

Monday

We sadly loaded our cases and said our goodbyes to Melrose, before our bus headed south to Hawick, for a quick visit to the Border Textile Towerhouse, where some interesting textile and other exhibits are displayed. In the ground floor Tower Room we watched a film presentation, telling the turbulent history of the 16th century towerhouse. Time was allowed to visit the High Street shops and cafes. Anne Reid and David Lampard chose instead to walk beside the River Tweed, and were rewarded with good views of a female **goosander** with about 12 newly-hatched ducklings and a single **tree bumblebee** (This species, *Bombus hypnorum*, is moving north and only reached Scotland in the last couple of years, thus a significant find. Record duly sent to relevant recording scheme. Ed.).

On the way home, we stopped off at Flotterstone, south of Edinburgh, for a short walk to the scenic reservoir. The weather was unseasonably chilly, but the rain kept off until we were back on the bus. An oil spillage on the Forth Road Bridge caused a diversion via Stirling. The inevitable delay was compensated for by good views of The Kelpies beside the M9. As we approached Dundee, the torrential rain, was plainly causing problems with the bus electrics, but our stalwart driver Paul managed to keep the bus going, until all but the Arbroath members had been safely dropped off. A replacement bus at Muirdrum was waiting to take them home.

Jenny Allan

AN ADDITIONAL ACCOUNT

Some of us were rather more energetic and put in a fair few extra miles in the course of the weekend. On arrival on the Friday the circular river walk was completed (separately) by Anne and David before dinner with a wide range of bird species seen including **common sandpiper**, nesting **sand martins**, **whitethroat**, **spotted flycatcher** and **bullfinch**.

On the Saturday, the weather was ideal for the Eildon walk. While most people just took the direct route, a number climbed Eildon North and then sat and enjoyed the magnificent view while eating lunch. A **tree pipit** was seen singing in a lone tree on the hillside. Anne, David, Liz and



Wendy then decided to descend to the east towards the Rhymer's stone. This proved to be more of a challenge for some than expected as the slope was very steep, but we all made it safely to flatter ground where **whitethroat** and **willow warblers** were singing in the dense **gorse** scrub. Here, a **green longhorn moth** was found - a very small moth with extremely long antennae, and not commonly seen. At the foot of the hill, amongst the grass and bracken we came upon a **fox** cub which must have been sleeping as we were almost upon it before it moved. It seemed very young to be on its own but then it became apparent that it had an injured eye which probably diminished its chances of survival. Needless to say, many photographs were taken of the poor wee thing.

Having found the Rhymer's stone, commemorating Thomas the Rhymer, we then followed more footpaths further east to look at the site of the Roman Fort of Trimontium. There is not a lot to see above ground but a large number of very detailed information boards. At the furthest point east we admired



the Leaderfoot viaduct, which once carried the railway across the Tweed, and observed **swifts** appearing to be using its crevices for nesting. In this area we also found **orange tip** and **peacock butterflies**. The walk back to Melrose seemed longer than it actually was due to the warm sun but the thought of cake and/or ice cream spurred us on. A short visit to the Abbey was fitted in before heading back for the hotel along the river walk and arriving slightly late for dinner! It later transpired that Jim and Ronnie had climbed both Mid and North Eildon before also investigating both the Rhymer's stone and Trimontium - they were also 'just in time' for dinner. Jim was out again

later on and saw and heard roding **woodcock** near the riverbank just upstream from the hotel.

After the Dawyck visit a final walk of the full river circuit from the hotel was undertaken before dinner, with yet another bird list being recorded. Over the course of the whole weekend 15 complete bird lists were made and put onto the BTO Birdtrack site. Overall, 65 species of birds were noted, and assorted insect and plant records also submitted to the relevant recorders.

Anne Reid

BLAIRADAM FOREST AND LOCHORE MEADOWS COUNTRY PARK

13th June

Despite the unseasonably cold weather 32 members made up the party. Initially the entire group spurned the easy alternative and all completed the main walk through Blairadam Forest with **goldcrests** twittering in the treetops and numerous **wrens** singing lustily from the undergrowth. The leading members of the party saw a **roe deer** and Anne spotted a young **jay**. Arriving back a little early for lunch allowed time to include the very pretty walk by the stream. Both walks produced an abundance of flowers - **water avens**, **pink purslane**, **wood sorrel**, late **bluebells**, **herb Robert**, **greater stitchwort** and, growing in water, **brooklime**. Drizzle set in as we finished lunch. We sheltered for a while at Baxter's retail outlet where we enjoyed the free food and drink samples (including gin! Ed.) and made use of the facilities.

On to Lochore where the party split into three. One group walked the north side, one the south and some stayed on the bus, all meeting up again at the cafe. The highlights were **northern marsh orchids**, the yellow form of *Viola tricolor* and a pair of **bullfinches** fluttering a few feet away. Canoes and swimmers discouraged waterfowl but further along a pair of **swans** were nesting. The south shore party made comprehensive plant and bird lists to be sent on to national recording schemes.

The Forestry Commission and Fife Council had both produced information leaflets with maps and historical information. Both sites were originally coal mining areas and remains of their industrial past were evident in places.

Margaret Bainbridge

ERROL

16th June

The party met at Errol Cross and luckily it was a fine evening. The route was from the Cross, south down the Gas Brae and then, straight down the track to Tay Lodge. On the Gas Brae we stopped for an explore around the recently created community garden which contained a large number of insect-attractive plants as well as hiding places for amphibians - a **toad** was seen. **Green-veined white** and **small tortoiseshell butterflies** were spotted in that area. On the recce the previous night we had seen good numbers of **tree sparrows**, **house martins**, **yellowhammer** and **swallows**. **Skylarks** were singing prominently over the fields of a grass ley. It was good to see that the cultivation was not entirely intensive, allowing the proliferation of arable weeds along field headlands, on the Errol Park land. Slightly further down the path **whitethroats** were spotted making their coarse contact calls, suggesting that a family group was there.

Some of the party did a short walk as far as the reed beds at Tay Lodge, rapidly applying insect repellent as the **midges** were out. In the reed beds there was a good selection of bird species included **sedge** and **willow warbler**, **chiffchaff**, **buzzard**, **blue tit** and **song thrush**. The short walk party then returned by the same route passing an excellent example of a tree with numerous **oak apple galls**. These are the galls created by a small wasp *Biorhiza pallida*. This gall represents one half of the two year life cycle of this wasp, the other being a gall on the roots of **oak**. The short walk party were then able to finish the evening with coffee in the conveniently placed Rattray's Bar while awaiting the return of the others.

The long walk group continued west along the raised bank through mixed woodland of mainly **beech**, **oak**, **sycamore** and **alder**, hearing the songs of **robin**, **wren** and **great tit** and seeing three or four pairs of **great crested grebes** on the Tay before they reached Port Allan. In the bay at Port Allan a **heron** was fishing. We turned north up the track and then east along a field margin before heading north and back to the main road and into the centre of Errol. During the recce walk a **marsh harrier** was seen over some of these arable fields and a young **great spotted woodpecker** and **goldfinches** along a well grown hedge between fields. A highlight of the final stage of the walk was the appearance of a squadron of around 15 **swifts** shooting across the sky just as it was starting to get towards dusk.

The bird lists were submitted on BirdTrack, the British Trust for Ornithology recording scheme.

Cathy and Barry Caudwell

FALLS OF LENY

27th June

Approximately 27 members took the bus to Callander for this outing to the Falls of Leny. It was a warm sunny day and we followed the road through Doune and along the River Teith to Callander.

From the coach park we headed downhill across the road to Callander Meadows Park. This is a popular area with walks along the riverside, play areas and wildlife areas. However, we turned west to follow National Cycle Route 7 towards Strathyre. The route follows the old Callander to Oban railway and there were old railway signs in the park to mark the way. Initially the path crossed through farmland with plenty of sheep on either side. In one of the wet meadows a **grasshopper**



Falls of Leny

Photograph David Lampard

warbler was heard and a **tree pipit** was singing on a dead tree in another meadow further on. Where the path came close to the river a **dipper**, **grey wagtails** and **goosander** were seen. There were good views of Ben Ledi and the Craggs above Callander

The path continues under a bridge and then crosses the main road. From there it was flat and well-formed following the Garbh Uisge on the right through the Pass of Leny. The path goes through mixed woodland with **ash**, **birch** and **oak**. We stopped for lunch at a bridge on the track, but the **midges** found us so nobody lingered too long. The path continues to the car park at the foot of Ben Ledi and it was near this point that we observed a **red squirrel** with an apparently deformed head. It eventually revealed itself to be carrying a kit, presumably to a safer place.

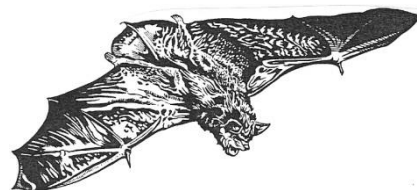
Returning, there was a detour through the woodland with closer views of the river and the Falls of Leny. This path follows a loop and eventually re-joins the main path back to Callander. There was plenty of wildlife to see with flowers in bloom along the path and amongst the trees.

Invertebrates seen included **angle shades** and **clouded border moths** as well as several micro moths. There were **leaf beetles**, a **dor beetle**, a **two-banded**

longhorn beetle, **violet ground beetles** and **sawflies**. Shortly after rejoining the main railway path, we found another group of walkers staring intently up into the tree canopy listening to the sound of a small warbler which, after several minutes, was determined to be a **wood warbler**. A pair of **nuthatches** and a **spotted flycatcher** were also seen in this area.

Unfortunately we also discovered an **ash** tree with symptoms of **ash die back** which may be a first sign in this woodland for the disease

On return to Callander, there was just enough time for a quick ice cream. Katie spotted a **bat**, probably a **pipistrelle**, flying in broad daylight, just before we all got back onto the bus for a scenic route home, through the Pass of Leny, past Loch Lubnaig and via Strathyre and Loch Earn.



David Lampard

STANNERGATE

7th July

This was a joint meeting of the Dundee Naturalists' Society and the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS), visiting this area of grassy shore in Dundee. We were recording both for the BSS urban project and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

Immediately before the meeting, what had been a pleasant day turned into a rainy deluge and I was pleased we had agreed to start at 7pm and not 6.30. Some rain continued to fall at times but it was much lighter and I was able to write in my notebook with the aid of an umbrella, which sometimes blew inside out. We walked slowly along the shore examining the grassy areas, the walls and climbing down onto the shore and the rocks.

We saw a fine display of wild flowers and recorded more than 100 species. We focussed particularly on the main eastern part of the site which appeared to have been less fully recorded in recent years.

A striking feature of this site is the quantity of **wild parsnip** (*Pastinaca sativa*) and there were also other species in the same **umbellifer** (Apiaceae) family. There were several plants in the **geranium** family including a fine display of **meadow cranesbill** (*Geranium pratense*) and also **cut-leaved cranesbill** (*G. dissectum*) and **dovesfoot cranesbill** (*G. molle*) as well as **common storksbill** (*Erodium cicutarium*).

The walls proved fruitful and remarkable quantities of **pellitory-of-the-wall** (*Parietaria judaica*) were present, as well as **wall-rue** (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*) and **maidenhair spleenwort** (*Asplenium trichomanes*), together with **sea pearlwort** (*Sagina maritima*). On the rocks and the walls were colourful displays of **stonecrops**, both **English** (*Sedum anglicum*) and **biting** (*Sedum acre*).

Near the shore were some interesting **sedges** including **distant sedge** (*Carex distans*) and **false fox sedge** (*Carex otrubae*). We failed to find the other special plant of this site, **shepherd's cress** (*Teesdalia nudicalis*) but we may have been too late in the year.

The **ragwort** (*Senecio jacobaea*) was covered in **cinnabar moth** caterpillars but no butterflies or moths were flying in the damp weather.

During our visit David Lampard explained the structure of the important volcanic lava outcrops here which unfortunately have been damaged by recent coastal works.

The members of both societies were thanked for their contributions in spite of the weather. A few hardy souls also went on to view the nearby population of the **northern marsh orchid** (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) on the wide grass verge of the main road.

Brian Ballinger

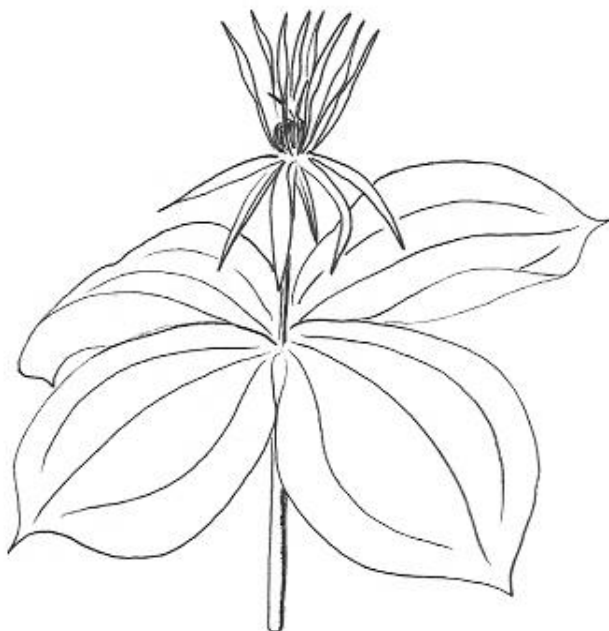
GLEN TILT

11th July

With an almost full bus we set off to Blair Atholl to enjoy a walk along the River Tilt, and we were fortunate to have some good weather. Our route set off from the car park along the river, through a meadow with a variety of common wild flowers including **water avens**, **campion** and

comfrey. The grassy meadow was an ideal habitat for a large number of **ringlet butterflies**. A number of people wondered at a newly laid out area next to the path, of mown grass with concrete strips in rows. The route went through a second car park, with a number of wildlife carvings, and Brian Allan spotted a plant of **musk mallow**, which a number of Nats photographed.

The route crossed the main road and took us along a field with two iconic Highland cattle which were clearly used to being photographed. The path continued along the river bank, with good views of the river and two **grey wagtails** were sighted here by Gordon and others. On the path a grotto had been built and it was at this point that we met a local dog walker who was able to solve the mystery of the concrete strips; it is going to be an extension of the graveyard. The route continued gently uphill with views of the river in the gorge below. Some members took the opportunity to break away from the path to take a detour to view the small hydro-electric workings at the junction of the River Tilt and the Fender Burn.



The path followed the estate road and two excellent specimens of **chicken of the woods** were noted. A number of Nats continued further along the path with the hope of crossing at Gilbert's Bridge and returning on the opposite bank of the river. However, due to shooting activity (with a warning red flag) the path was closed. Two **spotted flycatchers** were seen by Anne and Barry, as well as **golden-ringed dragonfly** (which obligingly posed for photographs) and a **dark green fritillary**. Cathy spotted a **red-necked footman moth**. Brian Ballinger found the **herb Paris**, which is at its most northerly site - good to see that it still thrives as previous Nats outings some years ago also noted the plant (shown left). The return journey through woodland gave sightings of **red squirrel** and a number of small birds including **chaffinch**, **blackbird** and **coal tit**, and a **jay** was heard.

We returned to the car park and enjoyed a welcome cup of tea or an ice cream before returning to Dundee.

Lorna Ward

BALGAVIES LOCH SWT RESERVE

BIOBLITZ

18th -19th July

The Nats took part in a bioblitz at Balgavies Loch jointly with the local SWT group. This was an attempt to record as many different species at the site in 24 hours. Several Nats members took part in the organising and setting up of the event and led guided walks. On the Saturday evening we arrived at about 7pm to set up the SWT gazebo and various traps and attractants, such as wine ropes. These are strips of cloth soaked in a mixture of wine, sugar and other sweet smelling substances which are left out around dusk and revisited to see what they attract. The first walk around the loch was for botanical recording and evening birds and bats. After disturbing two anglers (illegally fishing) we continued around the loch with bat detectors. Both species of **pipistrelle** were recorded but it was a bit too early for Daubentons. The wine ropes attracted several moth species including **light arches** and **common rustic**.

Unfortunately the weather worsened overnight and by Sunday morning there was a full-on downpour. Nevertheless, the three moth traps left out overnight produced a good number of species, although it kept the trappers occupied for most of the morning sorting and identifying the catch in the shelter of the gazebo. An impressive 152 individual moths were trapped, belonging to 49 species.

The weather cleared up for the afternoon and it eventually became quite warm. A number of guided walks took place for plant and bird recording and pond dipping sessions were organised for younger members of the societies and the public. The find of the day was a **water scorpion**, (Photo, right, David Lampard) which makes Balgavies the only site in Angus where it has been found. A total of around 400 species were recorded by the end of the 24 hour period, including 42 birds, 16 hoverflies, various beetles, bugs, bees and butterflies and a long list of plants. All these



records confirmed and supplemented previous records and have been added to the overall lists for the Reserve. Eventually about 20 Nats members braved the weather to turn out for the event.

David Lampard

QUARRY BARBECUE

4th August

When we arrived at the cottage we were greeted enthusiastically by the dogs, as usual, and got ourselves organised to transport the barbecue and other equipment into the quarry. We set up in the usual place, near the hide, and waited for more members to arrive. Brian and Jenny appeared with mulled wine which was handed out liberally to the great enjoyment of all present.

Jim led a walk around some of the developing woodland and we all tried to remember the time when the newly planted trees looked very small and widely spaced. Those who have not been members for that long had to take our word for it. A **hare** sped away on the approach of the group and someone spotted a **roe deer**. The bird life was a bit shy - partly because of the disturbance, but also due to the time of day - a short list included **buzzard**, **wren**, **yellowhammer**, **pheasant** and a juvenile **great spotted woodpecker**. Later on, a **dotted clay** and a **bordered straw** were the only two **moths** seen.

Meanwhile, Anne lit the barbecue and it was hot and ready for cooking when everyone got back. The usual mysterious foil parcels were piled on and soon everyone was munching happily. We were soon joined by Ronnie and Loraine and the dogs and socialising took precedence over natural history to round off a very pleasant evening.

Anne Reid

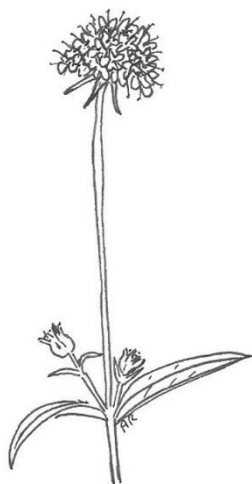
LAIRD'S LOCH AND NORTHBALLO HILL

8th August

Joint meeting with Butterfly Conservation.

We met at the small car park at Tullybaccart from which a small path leads SW through a community woodland to the east end of Laird's Loch. The mixed wooded area is to the North of the Loch with Hill of Dores, while Northballo Hill is mainly coniferous with **sitka spruce** and managed by the Forestry Commission. The privately owned Laird's Loch is an SSSI, described as being naturally mesotrophic with a surrounding acidic mire forming the most extensive example of this type of plant community in the Sidlaws. The shallow waters of the Loch contain a number of *Potamogeton* species and other submerged aquatics which were mainly not investigated on this occasion but are listed in the Site Management Statement. Fishing platforms at intervals around the Loch are now mainly

rotten. The loch is shallow with a dam at the western end. There was a pair of **mute swans** with cygnets sailing around the loch. Confusingly the vice-county boundary passes through the centre of Laird's Loch, so part of the walk was in East Perthshire and part in Angus.



Devil's bit scabious

When we set off the day was full of promise, beautiful sunshine and perfect for butterflies which were the main target of the day. One **dark green fritillary** was spotted flying across the road even before we left the car park. Annoyingly, however, it clouded over quite soon - but this did not stop us from seeing all of the expected species. The botanists and entomologists made slow progress along the North shore of the loch, stopping under the well-grown **Scots pine** trees to look at the **marsh pennywort** (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and luxuriantly large plants of **devil's bit scabious** (*Succisa pratensis*), **marsh cinquefoil** (*Potentilla palustris*) as well as a number of clumps of **common wintergreen** (*Pyrola minor*). Emergent aquatics included large areas of **bogbean** (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), three species of **horsetails** and **bottle sedge** (*Carex rostrata*). Lyn and Mandy Jones did great work compiling a plant list as we went along. Small **froglets** were common on the track beside the loch, and it was difficult to avoid them at times. Some of the birders headed off on a brisker walk around Northballo Hill and through the forestry. Barry, Liz and Wendy listed the birds seen. The sound of **buzzards** and sometimes **ravens** can be an evocative backdrop to a walk at Northballo. **Sparrowhawk** and **jay** were seen. A bonus for Gordon

Maxwell was the sight of two **ospreys** fishing at the loch just the day before our visit.

A stop for lunch beside the dam was a useful position from which to spot **dark green fritillaries** which frequent the open damp area there where the loch is drained by a small burn and some managed to get good photos of them. We also saw large numbers of **common** and **blue-tailed damselflies** (*Enallagma cyathigerum* and *Ischnura elegans*). The **common hawker dragonfly** (*Aeshna juncea*) was also present, and further up the hill Jim Cook identified a **common green grasshopper** (*Omocestus viridulus*).

Searching for day-flying moths close to the community woodland produced **common carpet** (*Epirrhoe alternata*), **light emerald** (*Campaea margaritata*), and **antler moth** (*Cerapteryx graminis*). On Northballo Hill we again found **common carpet** and also **smoky wainscot** (*Mythimna impura*) and several individuals of **grass rivulet** (*Perizoma albulata*) were netted close to a patch of its foodplant - **yellow rattle** (*Rhinanthus minor*). This may be a new site for the moth.

We proceeded further up the hill following the forestry tracks to the SE and then back again by a circular route. The forestry tracks are open and sheltered between plantations of **sitka**, with flowery verges including **birdsfoot trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*) and *Festuca* sp, and provide ideal flying conditions for the **common blue**, **small heath**, **dark green fritillary**, **ringlet**, **meadow brown** and **green-veined white butterflies**. Further up on the south side of the hill there are drainage ditches and banks with **violet** species on which the **dark green fritillary** lays its eggs.

Some members of the public were seen fishing at the dam end of the loch. They told us that they caught mainly **rainbow trout**, but that there were also **perch** there.

All in all, we had a very successful and enjoyable walk, about 26 people took part and we were delighted to welcome at least one enthusiastic young member.

Barry and Cathy Caudwell

BARRY BUDDON OPEN DAY

16th August

Over 60 members of the five local natural history clubs, RSPB, SOC, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Dundee Naturalists' Society and the Angus and Dundee Bird Club enjoyed the annual Barry Buddon open day outing in glorious sunshine.

Overall 61 bird species were recorded, including **cuckoo**, **whinchat**, **spotted flycatcher**, **willow warbler** and **whitethroat**. Raptor species included **osprey**, **peregrine falcon**, **sparrowhawk**, **kestrel** and **buzzard**.

Overnight moth trapping at Cowbyres produced 31 moth species with such wonderful names as **lesser swallow-prominent**, **coxcomb prominent**, **gold spangle**, **grass rivulet** and **orange**

swift. Ten butterflies were recorded over the whole site. An attempt to spot the elusive **purple hairstreak butterflies** was made difficult by the disappearance of the sun at the critical moment. Though two butterflies were seen, very briefly, above the **oak** canopy in the right place they were not positively identified.

The botanists enjoyed sightings of emerging **grass of Parnassus**, **restharrow** and **eyebright** amongst many others, though everything was flowering noticeably later than usual after the lack of real summer heat.

This year a greater emphasis was laid on site-specific recording of birds, plants and invertebrates to provide more meaningful records to add to the army's files on the site. It will help in years to come if the exact habitat can be revisited to check on survival, or otherwise, of species.

A great day out was enjoyed by all, despite some problems with locked gates and not enough key holders for our usual free access of the site. Thanks were expressed to the commandant for access.

Bob McCurley

DUNDEE LAW

25th August

This evening outing attracted about ten members led by David Lampard and Brian Ballinger. It was aimed at recording late summer flowering plants on the Law, as part of the Urban Flora project of the Botanical Society of Scotland. We started at the car park about half way up and followed the road to the top with detours to look at walls and shrubs. The Law has poor acid soils and we expected to find vegetation that likes this environment, however, there are some places where topsoil has been brought in to cover up old quarries.

Anne and Stevie caused some amusement when they both got down on their knees to photograph a large and unusual **puffball** (Photo, David Lampard). It was a beautiful, clear, sunny evening and excellent views of both road and rail bridges led to a lot more photographs being taken from, arguably, Dundee's best viewpoint. Around 79 species were recorded (see below) in about two hours, and records were submitted to the urban plant recording scheme.



David Lampard

Plant list courtesy of Brian Ballinger

Acer platanoides
Acer pseudoplanatus
Achillea millefolium
Aegopodium podagraria
Anisantha sterilis
Anthriscus sylvestris
Arrhenatherum elatius
Asplenium ruta-muraria
Asplenium trichomanes

Bellis perennis
Betula pendula
Buddleja davidii
Calystegia sepium
Campanula rotundifolia
Capsella bursa-pastoris
Centaurea nigra
Cerastium fontanum
Chamerion angustifolium
Cirsium arvense
Cirsium vulgare
Cotoneaster sp.

Crataegus monogyna
Cytisus scoparius
Dactylis glomerata
Digitalis purpurea
Epilobium montanum
Festuca rubra
Galeopsis tetrahit
Galium aparine
Galium verum
Geum urbanum
Heracleum sphondylium
Hesperis matronalis

Holcus lanatus
Knautia arvensis
Lamium purpureum
Lapsana communis
Larix x marshallinsii
Lathyrus pratensis
Leucanthemum vulgare
Lotus corniculatus
Lunaria annua
Lysimachia vulgaris
Matricaria discoidea
Myosotis arvensis
Papaver dubium
Phragopodium viscosum (a
 rust)
Phyllitis scolopendrium

Pinus sylvestris
Plantago lanceolata
Plantago major
Poa annua
Polygonum arenastrum
Potentilla anserina
Prunella vulgaris
Ranunculus repens
Rubus fruticosus
Rubus idaeus
Sambucus nigra
Senecio jacobaea
Senecio viscosus
Silene dioica
Sisymbrium officinale
Sonchus asper

Sonchus oleraceus
Sorbus intermedia?
Sorbus aucuparia
Stellaria graminea
Stellaria media
Tanacetum vulgare
Taraxacum agg
Trifolium dubium
Trifolium repens
Tripleurospermum inodorum
Tussilago farfara
Urtica dioica
Veronica persica?
Vicia sepium
Viola arvensis

KINNOULL HILL

Fungus Foray
 12th September

This Dundee Naturalists' Society foray was promoted more widely by the new Tayside and Fife Fungal Group, so attracted around a dozen attendees drawn from both bodies together with the Perthshire Society of Natural Science. It was a wet and chilly day, the rain unfortunately having arrived too late after a dry week to bring on many fruiting bodies.

We met in the Jubilee Car Park and spent quite a while searching the conifer plantation before reaching the northern slopes of Kinnoull Hill proper where we stopped for lunch in steady drizzle. By the time we climbed to the summit, the rain had eased off, but the cloud base remained below the treetops - although we still managed to spot a couple of **red squirrels**. We were glad to have use of the Forestry Commission building near the car park, which was invaluable for providing a sheltered place to examine our specimens. A reasonable variety of more than 30 fungal species was found, although nothing spectacular (see list below). Some of the same species had been recorded here in 1984 by Margaret King of Montrose Museum. Gordon Maxwell was able to add a handful of further species from across the road in Deuchny Wood.

As much of Kinnoull Hill falls within the Perth City boundary, we were also able to assist Brian Ballinger in gathering records for the BSS Urban Flora of Scotland, although it does seem rather like cheating to classify Kinnoull Hill as 'urban'!

Colin McLeod

Fungus list for outing from Jim Cook, with grid references.

Kinnoull Hill fungus list

Agaricus silvaticus
Amanita rubescens
Armillaria mellea

Blushing Wood Mushroom
 The Blusher
 Honey Fungus

Under Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) 14350 23605
 In deciduous leaf litter 14334 23624
 Rhizomorphs (only) on dead elm trunk 14079 22847

<i>Bjerkandera adusta</i>	Smoky Bracket	On fallen branches and dead wood 14316 23617 and 1395 2335
<i>Clavulina rugosa</i>	Wrinkled Club	In grass beside track 14221 23624
<i>Cantharellus cibarius</i>	Chanterelle	On a bank at the edge of the wood 14263 23632
<i>Coprinus comatus</i>	Shaggy Inkcap/ Lawyer's Wig	In grass near path 14329 23600
<i>Coprinellus micaceus</i>	Glistening Inkcap	On wood chippings and old stump 14341 23608 and 14338 23633
<i>Collybia (Gymnopus) confluens</i>	Clustered Toughshank	Dense tufts in deciduous litter 13760 23119 and 14212 21368
<i>Collybia (Gymnopus) peronata</i>	Wood Woollyfoot	In leaf litter under beech trees 13768 23119
<i>Coriolus (Trametes) versicolor</i>	Turkeytail	On decayed conifer stump 14222 23624
<i>Cortinarius albobolaceus</i>	Pearly Webcap	A few in deciduous woodland 1395 2335
<i>Dacrymyces stillatus</i>	Common Jelly Spot	On old wet conifer stump 13756 23572
<i>Diatrype disciformis</i>	Beech Barkspot	On small fallen beech branch 1409 2397
<i>Fomes fomentarius</i>	Horse's-hoof fungus	On fallen birch trunk 1394 2335
<i>Heterobasidion annosum</i>	Root (or Heart) Rot	On sides of conifer stumps and log 1409 2397 and 13760 23119
<i>Hypoxylon fragiforme</i>	Beech Woodward	On fallen beech trunk 14090 23597
<i>Hypoxylon nummularium</i>	Black Bark-crust	On cut surface of ash stump 14100 22859
<i>Laccaria amethystina</i>	Amethyst Deceiver	Many, in deep beech litter 1412 2357
<i>Laccaria laccata</i>	The Deceiver	Small numbers, in beech litter 1412 2357
<i>Lactarius blennius</i>	Beech Milkcap	Common in litter under beech trees 14212 21368
<i>Lactarius turpis</i>	Ugly Milkcap	In beech litter 13806 22786
<i>Lactarius vietus</i>	Grey Milkcap	In longish grass near birch 1394 2335
<i>Lentinellus cochleatus</i>	Aniseed Cockleshell	In bare soil near beech trees 13788 22988
<i>Lycoperdon perlatum</i>	Common Puffball	In grassy open patch near mixed wood 14352 23605
<i>Lyophyllum connatum</i>	White Domecap	In moss under sycamores 1396 2335
<i>Marasmius androsaceus</i>	Horsehair Parachute	In litter on fallen Sitka spruce needles 1403 2348
<i>Marasmius rotula</i>	Collared Parachute	In litter under beech trees 13817 22802
<i>Mycena galopus</i> var <i>galopus</i>	Milking Bonnet	Tufts in leaf litter, under conifers 14263 23632
<i>Oudemansiella mucida</i>	Porcelain Fungus	Only on beech, on fallen branches 13770 23007
<i>Paxillus involutus</i>	Brown Rollrim	In leaf litter under birch trees 14121 23607
<i>Phallus impudicus</i>	Stinkhorn	In litter and sparse grass under birches 13763 22448
<i>Piptoporus betulinus</i>	Birch Bracket	On standing dead birch trunks 14090 23975 and 1395 2335
<i>Rhytisma acerinum</i>	Tarspot	Only on sycamore leaves 14162 23634 and around about
<i>Russula delica</i>	Milk-white Brittlegill	In litter under beech trees 14212 21368
<i>Russula nobilis (mairei)</i>	Beechwood Sickener	Numbers in beech litter 1412 2357
<i>Russula ochroleuca</i>	Ochre Brittlegill	In moss under pines 14188 23621, 1403 2348 and 1395 2335
<i>Russula vesca</i>	The Flirt	A few in beech litter 14334 23624
<i>Scleroderma citrinum</i>	Common Earthball	Under young oak tree in quarry area 14350 23605
<i>Stereum hirsutum</i>	Hairy Curtain Crust	Along length of a fallen branch 14326 23624
<i>Tricholoma virgatum</i>	Ashen Knight	In leaf litter 1396 2335 and 13776 23050
<i>Tremella mesenterica</i>	Yellow Brain	On small dead branch of an ash tree 13763 22448
<i>Xerocomus (Boletus) chrysenteron</i>	Red-cracking Bolete	Near birch and conifers 14362 23602 and 14206 24640
<i>Xerula (Oudemansiella) radicata</i>	Rooting Shank	In beech litter and base of old stump 13935 23362
<i>Xylaria polymorpha</i>	Dead Man's Fingers	On old deciduous stump 13935 23362

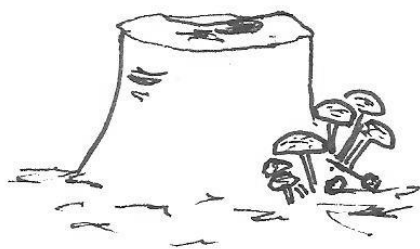
Slime Moulds:

<i>Fuligo septica</i>	Yellow / Vomit Slime Mould	On standing dead birch trunk base 1394 2335
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Plus, on **Deuchny Hill** (explored by Gordon Maxwell only):

All specimens are from 1-km square NO 1423 -

<i>Amanita crocea</i>	Orange Grisette	Mixed woodland
<i>Amanita vaginata</i>	Grisette	Mixed woodland
<i>Boletus calopus</i>	Bitter Beech Bolete	Mixed woodland
<i>Boletus edulis</i>	Cep or Penny Bun	Mixed woodland
<i>Calocera viscosa</i>	Yellow Stagshorn	On an old stump
<i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i>	Blushing Bracket	On fallen birch trunk
<i>Phaeolus schweinitzii</i>	Dyer's Mazegill	Mixed woodland
<i>Pleurotus ostreatus</i>	Oyster Mushroom	Mixed woodland
<i>Russula cyanoxantha</i>	The Charcoal Burner	Mixed woodland
<i>Russula xerampelina</i>	Crab Brittlegill	Mixed woodland
<i>Stereum hirsutum</i>	Hairy Curtain Crust	Mixed woodland



PHOTOGRAPHS



Shoveler by Barry Farquharson
The winning entry in the 2015 Photographic Competition for the Kim Eberst Trophy



Details of insectivorous plants from Glasgow Botanic Garden
Photographs by Stevie Smith (See article on page 10)





**Himalayan blue poppy at Dawyck Botanic Garden
Photograph by Anne Reid (See page 13)**



**Dianthus deltoides (left) and Campanula
rapunculoides (below) at Monifieth
Photographs by Brian Allan
(See page 42)**



AUTUMN MEETINGS

AROUND THE UPPER ENGADINE

Lynn and Michael Almond - 6th October

We were looking for a blockbuster to start our lecture series and Lynn and Michael gave us just that.

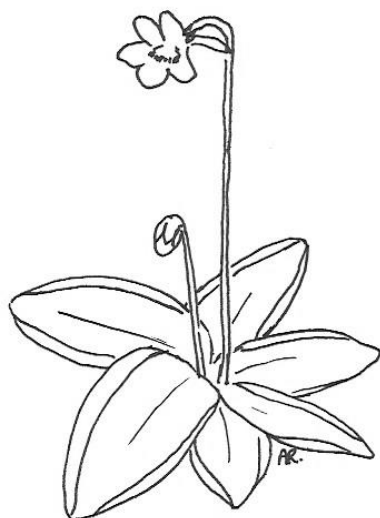
The Engadine is an area of the Alps in South East Switzerland, which Michael and Lynn know well, centred around the towns of St. Moritz and Pontresina. Their presentation transported us up a number of small valleys, branching from two main valleys, leading east and west from St. Moritz, to see a wonderland of special Alpine plants.

The first area was Muottas Muragl, where we were shown *Ranunculus keupferi*, a lovely white **buttercup**, and carpets of yellow *Gagea* flowers, interspersed with the delightful *Crocus albiflorus*. Also seen here were dainty **snowbells**, *Soldanella pusilla*, in white and violet, the stately *Primula latifolia*, growing cheek by jowl with the **pasque flowers**, *Pulsatilla apiifolia*, and yellow *Pulsatilla vernalis*.

Next was Alp Languard, where **bird's-eye primrose**, *Primula farinosa*, both pink and white forms, **butterwort**, *Pinguicula leptoceras*, *Aster alpinus*, our own Ben Lawers favourite **forget-me-not**, *Myosotis alpestris*, **king of the Alps**, *Eritrichium nanum*, a pink *Androsace alpina*, and the bright yellow *Geum reptans* were flowering. Here the lake was surrounded by mountains, covered with patches of late snow and cheeky, but surprisingly tame **marmots**, *Marmota marmot*, played up to the camera.

Near the head of the main west valley was Val Fain, a gentle flat area grazed by a few alpine cows and, whilst watching and listening to Michael's commentary, I could imagine hearing their cow bells tinkling, as they devoured countless alpine gems. Michael explained that the grazing is well controlled, keeping the meadows ideal for the sweet grasses and flowers the beasts love. The plants here included *Lilium martagon*, *Rhododendron ferrugineum* and the scented *Daphne striata* alongside tall yellow *Gentiana punctata*. Further up, Michael and Lynn found the surprisingly rare **edelweiss**, *Leontopodium alpinum*, carpets of the delightful *Primula integrifolia*, and on the screes, the high alpine **buttercup**, *Ranunculus alpestris*. Here too was the tiny **gentian**, *Gentiana nivalis*, which also grows on some Scottish mountains, and a number of **orchids**, *Pseudorchis albida*, *Dactylorhiza (Coeloglossum) viridis*, probable *Gymnadenia (Nigritella) austriaca* and *Orchis ovalis*.

The last valley on the west side led up to the Passo del Bernina, where amongst the carpets of *Primula integrifolia* and **creeping azalea**, *Loiseleuria procumbens*, were the large blue trumpets of *Gentiana acaulis*. On the rocks was another **primula** growing in bright pink drifts, *Primula hirsuta*.



We then moved to the east valley where many more species were seen, alongside more wonderful alpine views, covered with more species not yet described by Michael. He then named all the plants which we were to delight over - **campanulas**, **trumpet gentians**, two species of **monkshood**, *Aconitum* and ground-cover species like *Globularia cordifolia*, and **mountain avens**, *Dryas octopetala*. The Val Rosegg featured stands of *Gentiana lutea* with *Campanula barbata*, and a **Jacob's ladder**, *Polemonium caeruleum*, and at Surlej were *Geum reptans* and *Saxifraga oppositifolia*. At Ils Lejins, overlooking the Lej da Segl, *Saxifraga aizoides* was with *Gentiana verna*, and higher up *Ranunculus glacialis* was found growing in the snow melt. At the small lake, Lejin Epidot, we were shown *Saxifraga exarata*, another **snowbell** species, *Soldanella alpina* and many more lovely plants of *Eritrichium nanum*.

Moving on to Pass dal Güglia and Piz Nair, **primula** hybrids were found, *Primula integrifolia* x *hirsuta* with *Primula elatior*, **alpine butterwort**, *Pinguicula alpina*, *Androsace obtusifolia*, **fleabane**, *Erigeron uniflorus*, and three **violets**, the small yellow *Viola biflora*, *V. calcarata*, and the local *V. cenisia*. On the rocks were *Androsace alpina*, and *Androsace helvetica*.

The final areas featured carpets of *Gentiana verna*, *Primula farinosa*, *Loiseleuria procumbens* and large clumps of **leopards bane**, *Doronicum columnae* and screes dotted with **alpine toadflax**, *Linaria alpina*, and *Saxifraga oppositifolia*.

All in all we had a wonderful journey through this small, but unique, landscape, ably described and photographed by Lynn and Michael.

Brian Allan

HIGHLAND WILDLIFE

Neil McIntyre - 14th October

This year it was the turn of the Scottish Wildlife Trust Group for Angus and Dundee to arrange the bi-annual lecture for the joint Wildlife Groups.

I have known Neil McIntyre since he first came to prominence as a wildlife photographer in the 1980s. Since then he has gained many awards and grown in stature to the point where he was the signature speaker at the Scottish Wildlife Photo-Fair this year. He very kindly agreed to come down to talk to us.

Neil's work has moved on over the years. Living in Speyside, he knows the area and its wildlife intimately. He established his reputation with amazing pictures of the hard-to-find mammals, of which the rest of us get only glimpses. Now he looks for action shots, watching wildlife for hours till he gets just the pose, the action, the whole atmosphere exactly as he wants it. He is happy to explain his techniques, but I think most of his audience would be happy to enjoy his pictures in comfort rather than spending hours or days in cold cramped hides, waiting for just the right powdering of snow to complete the scene.

We not only saw wonderful pictures of birds, animals and wonderful scenery, but also learned so much about them; information gleaned from his long hours in the field. Sadly the enforced move of lecture venue to the new Dalhousie Building may have put some people off attending. For those who missed his talk, and those who would love to see some of it again, I recommend his website, www.neilmcintyre.com.

Liz Houghton

EAST ANGLIAN DELIGHTS

Anne Reid - 27th October

We had an entertaining talk by our own Anne Reid about the natural wonders of East Anglia. Anne often visits family in Cambridge but had never ventured further east so in July 2013 she decided to change that and explore what East Anglia had to offer. It happened that the visit was during a heatwave with the temperature around 30°C for most of the week. This warm weather did mean good news for wildlife, much of it not often seen as far north as Tayside, but some of the birds seemed less active than usual and hard to spot.

It did not take long to see the diversity of wildflowers and butterflies on regenerated chalk grassland on former agricultural land at Magog Down near Cambridge. Taking photographs is usually great for identification purposes but one photo of a butterfly was not helpful as the important diagnostic feature (the tip of the antenna) was not captured - this left a query as to whether it was an **Essex skipper** or a **small skipper**. The **marbled white butterfly** presented no such problems. There was a nice photograph of **bristly oxtongue** and a photo of an **orobanche**; a plant that parasitizes **knapweed** and lacks green pigment.

A visit to the RSPB Fen Drayton Lakes revealed more butterflies such as the **gatekeeper** and a large number of **damsel** and **dragonfly** species including the **black-tailed skimmer**. Not all the animals seen here were adults as we were shown a

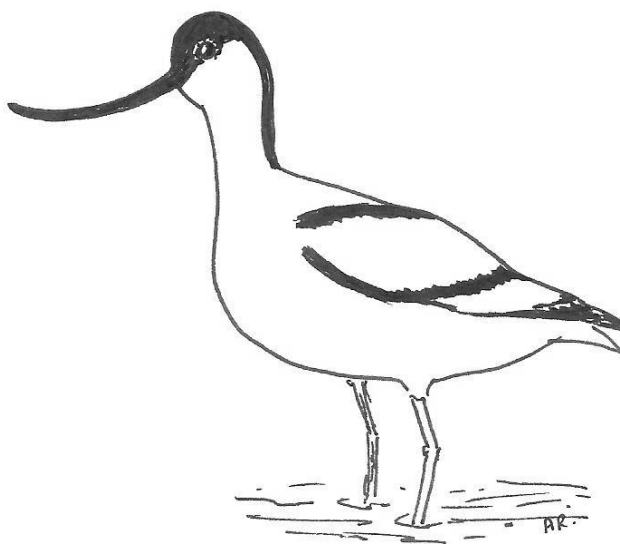


nice photo of a **peacock** caterpillar looking for a safe place to pupate. Despite being an RSPB nature reserve, bird sightings seemed to be few and far between, the avian highlight being the unmistakable call of a **cuckoo** in the distance. The bird life wasn't much more active at RSPB Fowlmere as a **turtle dove** was heard, but sadly it kept tantalizingly out of view. The reserve did have a good selection of wild **thistles** to photograph such as **marsh thistle** and the **welted thistle** which is not so commonly seen north of the border.

It was time to give Suffolk a visit and Anne ventured into the RSPB Lakenheath Fen where she took a brilliant photograph of a female **black-tailed skimmer** and an interesting photo of several **large skipper** butterflies hanging upside down resting with their wings semi-open. The bird life did make a brief appearance in the form of a **reed bunting** singing on a **willow** tree, perhaps calling for a new brood.

Next, Anne went to the City of Norwich where she spotted a lot more wildlife than expected. It was while watching **banded demoiselle damselflies** darting around above **water lilies** that she noticed an impressive **pike** lying in wait below the river surface. The **pike** did not escape the chance to be snapped by the camera and its photo shows just how stealthy this aquatic predator can be. The nearby RSPB Strumpshaw Fen offered glimpses of another type of hunter, the **marsh harrier** which are fairly common here (at least when compared to Scotland). Anne was able to take photos of a **black and yellow longhorn beetle** and one of a **golden-dusted grey longhorn beetle** sitting on a **nettle**. There was a photograph of a type of cucumber called the **white bryony** which, like so many common species here, is actually quite rare in Scotland. Before Anne left this reserve she took a picture of a **black-headed gull** (to make up for the lack of birds making themselves known on this outing) and afterwards realised that she had also caught the profile of a **black-tailed skimmer** peacefully sitting behind the gull.

Next stop was RSPB Titchwell Marsh on the north coast of Norfolk and the birds were out in force when compared to the previous few days. There were plenty of **avocets** although the only ones that stood still long enough to get their picture taken were snoozing. Anne did get an action photo of an **avocet** threatening a **mallard** that came a bit too close. In addition there was a photo of a **shoveler** duck with seven ducklings and a **little egret**; these white herons are now breeding in East Anglia. Anne later went for a walk along the beach and found that while huge numbers of **razor shells** dominated one area, another part of the beach about a mile away had a much more varied mixture of shells, though still in large numbers. **Sea lavender** was photographed here in the extensive salt marsh. A return to Titchwell the following morning gave a sighting and, finally, a long awaited picture of a **bearded tit** (something she had been searching for during the whole trip).



The last part of the journey included a walk by the shore at Hunstanton near the Wash, famed for its spectacular **chalk** and **red sandstone** cliffs dating back to the Cretaceous Period approximately 100 million years ago. Here she noticed that **swifts** were using gaps in the cliff face to nest in. A swift visit to the Snettisham RSPB Reserve nearby gave clear views across the mud of the Wash, famed for their winter wader flocks. While here, Anne took a photo of **houndstongue** and found a pair of **Egyptian geese**, now naturalised in East Anglia.

Anne's talk was certainly intriguing and will encourage many of us who haven't been to East Anglia to go there soon.

Mike Sedakat

EDINBURGH'S URBAN RIBBON

The Mosses and Liverworts of the Water of Leith
David Chamberlain - 10th November
Joint Meeting with the Botanical Society of Scotland

Dr David Chamberlain from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh gave a talk on the **mosses** and **liverworts** (bryophytes) growing in or by the Water of Leith, Edinburgh. This was a joint meeting between the Dundee Naturalists' Society and the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS) and was part of the BSS urban flora project. The speaker described a survey carried out with the help of 15 other people and which had an educational as well as recording purpose.

The Water of Leith extends for about 26 miles and about half of its course is in an urban environment, with a further quarter flowing through the more rural areas within the city boundary. Even in the city, by Dean Bridge, it still has a fairly wild character in places. It starts at an altitude of 408 metres and ends at sea level at Leith with an average air temperature variation of 2 - 4°C from start to finish.

The survey team recorded mosses and lichens in one kilometre squares over the length of the water-way and identified 205 species in all, about 20% of the British flora. The rock is mainly sandstone, quite base-rich in places and other rock types have been brought in by human intervention.

Human influence may have played a part in spreading mosses along the footpath by cycling, walking and fishing. Human induced air pollution and temperature increase may have also had an influence. Many of the species were well-known and widespread but some were rare, including one only recorded in one other place in the world and still awaiting a name.

The Harperrig reservoir lies about six miles from the river's source and when the level is very low some unusual species occur including *Bryum klinggraeffii* which reproduces asexually. Very common species such as *Hypnum cupressiforme* are widespread here and elsewhere.

Some species which are mainly southern such as *Fissidens crassipes* are only to be found in the lower warmer parts whereas other northern species such as *Hygrohypnum ochraceum* are only seen in the higher upper reaches. Some mosses such as *Orthotrichum diaphanum* tolerate pollution well whereas others such as *Orthotrichum pulchellum* do not. Others, such as *Gyroweisia tenuis*, are limited to more basic rocks.

David illustrated his talk with some fine photographs of bryophytes and afterwards provided a display of species under microscopes which generated much interest.

We thanked the speaker for a very interesting presentation about a sometimes neglected group of organisms.

Brian Ballinger



Hair moss, *Polytrichum* sp

EAST SANDS, ST ANDREWS

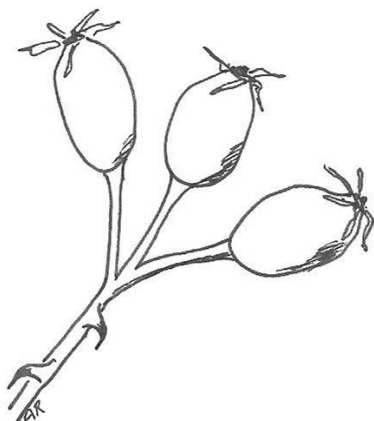
14th November

In between the miserably wet and windy conditions of 'Abigail', the first named storm in the UK, and incoming ex-hurricane Kate, a brief spell of reasonable but still blustery weather offered a short respite for the Nats autumn outing. A dozen members gathered in the Leisure Centre car park

to enjoy the natural delights along the East Sands Cliffs path at St Andrews. Anne Reid had arrived much earlier (having dropped Colin off at Dundee station for an early train) and set off intending to meet up with us but in fact walked as far as Kingsbarns and caught the bus back. The most far-travelled of the group - and surely the keenest - were Katie August and her Dad, Ryan, who'd come down from near Brechin to join us. Unfortunately one of the co-leaders, Brian Allan, was feeling unwell but Jenny was able to come along and organise the food in the Kingsbarns Hotel. Our grateful thanks to Jenny! All present were well wrapped up against the boisterous cold wind and shod in boots or wellies, to cope with the anticipated mud. Heading along the path beside the East Sands, very little beach life was in evidence, only a few **gulls**, a **curlew** which flew off, one or two **oystercatchers** and a lone **pie wagtail**.

Up along the cliff-top path beside the caravan site we found several interesting fungi, including **clouded agaric** (*Clitocybe nebularis*), and then Wendy Irons pointed out a large flock of **fieldfares** flying past. She also spotted a small brown **fungus cap**, perhaps a *Galerina* species, at the path edge in dense moss growth. At the same time a number of us admired the forms in the seashore rocks, the curving anticlines and synclines laid out below the cliffs, revealed by the receding tide.

A short time later, past the caravan site, Davie Stein picked out a small **common funnelcap** (*Clitocybe gibba*) which smelled sweet and slightly of aniseed. Further along, the clifftop path became much more muddy and we needed to walk carefully to avoid slipping. Our honorary president, Gordon Corbet, pointed out the distinctive shapes of **wood ear** or **jelly ear** (*Auricularia auricula-judae*) growing on an old elder branch. The most colourful fungi of all, though, were the brightly-coloured jelly-like masses of **yellow brain** (*Tremella mesenterica*) found by Ronnie Ogg on dead stalks of gorse. Gordon Maxwell called out "Did you see those?", indicating a large group of 14 **whooper swans** flying along the cliff edge and then, shortly after, pointed out tufts of **velvet shank** or **winter fungus** (*Flammulina velutipes*).



We made our way up to the main path and then walked along towards a good view out over the outer Firth of Tay, the dark woods by Tentsmuir Point, and the distant Angus coast. Arbroath, Carnoustie and the giant wind turbines at Michelin in Dundee could all be identified clearly. Ronnie was looking at a fine array of red **rosehips** when Gordon Corbet pointed out numerous brown galls on the rose of **Robin's pincushion** (caused by a tiny parasitic wasp, *Diplolepis rosae*). Gordon continued on to describe the fascinating array of other life, the tiny wasp itself, hyper-parasites and inquillines, which could be found within the one gall. The way to see them was to take an intact gall home and keep it in a jar until the spring to see what emerges. Must try that!

By this time, however, it was nearly noon and time to turn back for the hotel lunch. It had been only a mile or two along the cliffs but, despite the season, there was plenty of wildlife to see (and help develop the appetite!) - and finished off by a very pleasant and relaxing lunch.

Jim Cook

In addition, Anne saw a **short-eared owl** being chased by **crows** near Boarhills. There was a large group of **mallard** and **Canada geese** at the mouth of the Kenly Burn, beyond Boarhills, with a single **shoveler** in amongst them and a large flock of **chaffinches**, **linnets**, **reed buntings** and **yellowhammers** at a field edge with a bird-friendly set-aside strip nearby.

BIRDS OF CLACKMANNANSHIRE

Keith Broomfield - 24th November

Well-known to many as a columnist in the weekend Courier magazine, Keith freely admitted that this should have been titled 'Birds and Other Natural History of my Home Patch' as he becomes passionate about any area where he lives. Throughout his talk he used images by Dave Taylor of Wildpix Scotland with some of his own.

The passion for birds started when he saw a **pied wagtail** through the window at school in Edinburgh. Though he didn't know what it was, he looked it up, identified it and was hooked. His local area then included a disused railway where he saw **foxes** and the Water of Leith which had **water voles**. The suburban patchwork of habitats held more songbirds than the countryside.

A zoology degree in Aberdeen gave opportunities to see new species including seabirds at the Bullers of Buchan and such specialities as **capercaillie** and **black grouse** up Deeside. His current 'home patch' is near Dollar in Clackmannanshire where he has been for the last eight years or so. He has become very familiar with the banks of the River Devon with the introduced **dame's violet** and the more invasive **Himalayan balsam**, **sand martins** nesting in the eroded riverbank and **salmon** leaping up the weir. **Common sandpiper** occur but may be predated by **mink**, though the increase in **otters** is reducing the numbers of **mink**. **Heron**s, **goosander** and **kingfishers** all compete for the **sticklebacks** and **minnows**, while fishermen hunt larger prey.

The local woods provided a site, well off the beaten track, where Keith set up a trail camera to ascertain whether **red squirrels** were around but resulted in images of **grey squirrels** instead. With bait attractant this was a good way of recording **jays** which are notoriously shy birds. He also uses the camera to record **badger** activity to prove occupancy of local setts.

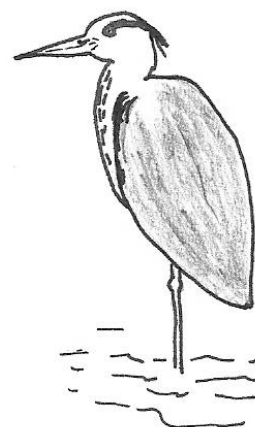
The nearby Ochil Hills once had **mountain hares**, but this was an isolated population and has now died out. However, **meadow pipits** and **wheatears** are regularly seen up here and the climb is worth it for the excellent views. Nearby, the Woodland Trust has planted over a million trees in Glen Sherratt to increase biodiversity and such species as **willow warbler** and **sparrowhawk** have moved in.

Keith finished the talk with a diversion to underwater photography which is one of his passions. He is hoping to produce a snorkeller's guide to the Mediterranean and showed us his own images of a **moray eel** in unusually shallow water, a **black goby**, a **dusky grouper** and a **square-tailed rabbit fish**. The last is native to the Red Sea but has invaded the eastern Mediterranean through the Suez Canal.

The final plug was for the 2001 book 'The Birds of Clackmannanshire' by Neil Bielby, Keith Broomfield and John Grainger. Keith is clearly a naturalist with diverse interests, like most of those present, who gave a hearty show of their appreciation at the end of the talk.

Anne Reid

Footnote: Keith accepted our invitation to join a few of us in the pub afterwards and while finding out more about the Nats expressed an interest in seeing a copy of our Annual Bulletin which was duly posted to him. The weekend before Christmas his Courier column extolled the wide interests and good qualities of a society such as ours (and PSNS to whom he had talked last year) in the recording of and enthusiasm for wildlife, and gave our contact details. Thank you Keith!



MOSSES AND LIVERWORTS OF THE HOWFF, DUNDEE

with Dr David Chamberlain
2nd December

The Howff is a listed ancient graveyard in the centre of Dundee. The gravestones are of considerable historical interest but many are covered in moss which makes it difficult or impossible to read the inscriptions. The Friends of the Howff had enquired as to whether it would be possible to remove some moss to study inscriptions.

David Chamberlain of the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh kindly agreed to visit to review the mosses and liverworts (bryophytes) in the graveyard to see if any were of conservation importance. The records would contribute to the British Bryological Society database and to the Botanical Society of Scotland's urban flora project. He was accompanied by members of Dundee Naturalists' Society and the Friends of the Howff.

We were fortunate in choosing a pleasant, mild, dry day and a total of 20 moss and two liverwort species were identified. The species were typical of an urban site and no rarities were seen.

Typical mosses included *Grimmia pulvinata* (**grey-cushioned grimmia**), *Amblystegium serpens* (**creeping feather-moss**) and *Brachythecium rutabulum* (**rough-stalked feather-moss**).

Richard Brinklow also looked at the lichens and identified nine species, none of which was scarce. Some other members of the party noted the birds, including a **redwing**, a **song thrush** and a small flock of **goldfinches**, and the planted trees and shrubs also attracted interest.

In the afternoon we moved on to review the bryophytes on a patch of waste ground in Grassmarket and 14 different species were present, again typical of an urban location. A section of old city wall in Nethergate yielded nine bryophyte species

We are very grateful to David for this instructive and valuable visit.

Brian Ballinger

DAUNDER DOON THE DIGHTY

Jim Cook - 8th December

The 15 mile long Dighty Burn arises from several sources, including Loch Long and Lundie Loch, entering NW Dundee at Strathmartine. During Dundee's industrial past, several flax mills were sited alongside the Dighty Burn, and remnants of this industry can still be found, including the remains of old buildings and machinery, bleach fields and retting ponds. Thankfully, the industrial pollution ended with the demise of the industry, and the river is now clean and sparkling with diverse and interesting wildlife, although Jim explained there is still a problem with agricultural run-off in some areas, causing an overgrowth of algal slime. More modern pollution is caused by thoughtless humans, including old bikes, supermarket trollies and litter of all kinds.

Water crowfoot, *Ranunculus aquatilis*, and **brooklime**, *Veronica beccabunga*, flourish in the river shallows, and on the river banks, **sweet cicely**, *Myrrhis odorata*, **white dead nettle**, *Lamium album*, and **pink purslane**, *Montia sibirica*, make a pretty show, with occasional clumps of **meadow cranesbill**, *Geranium pratense*, **greater bittercress**, *Cardamine amara*, and climbing **greater bindweed**, *Calystegia sylvatica*. Less welcome are the aliens, **giant hogweed**, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, which causes nasty blisters on contact with its sap, and **Himalayan balsam**, *Impatiens glandulifera*, which has very pretty pink flowers, but its explosive seed dispersal mechanism has resulted in this plant literally taking over large areas of the river banks, preventing native species from establishing. Strenuous efforts by Dundee Council, have reduced the numbers of giant hogweed, but continuing vigilance is needed, since each plant produces large amounts of viable seed. Jim also spotted a few plants of the highly invasive **Japanese knotweed**, *Reynoutria japonica*, which can undermine house foundations.

Mallard and **goosanders** are now a common sight on the Dighty Burn. The Trottick Ponds are also home to nesting **swans**, photographed with cygnets, and myriad smaller species including **frogs**, in adult and tadpole stages, **mayflies** and **water snails**. Jim spotted and photographed a **treecreeper**, typically climbing a tree; a hole found in the river bank could have been made by a **water vole** or a **mouse**, but none were spotted. Another hole provided access to a **wasp** bike. Best avoided!



Finlathen Aqueduct Photograph Jenny Allan

The mostly tree-lined banks of the Dighty have many scenic views. The most famous of these is the vista of the Seven Arches viaduct, near the river's shore outlet at Monifieth. The viaduct once carried the Dundee to Forfar railway line. Also of interest are the stone built arches of the Finlathen Aqueduct, built by Dundee Water Company around 1844 as part of a pipeline to bring water from the Monikie Reservoirs. The original stonework on the once derelict Milton Mill, at Monifieth, has been retained and the restored building is now a block of attractive modern flats. Jim's talk ended with a brief illustration of species found on or near the shore area. **Hart's tongue ferns** grow abundantly on the stone railway bridge over the Dighty, carrying the main Aberdeen rail line. A diverse colourful dune flora includes **poppies** and **tansy**, with attendant **small tortoiseshell butterflies**. On the beach, shore grasses and **oraches** predominate. Abundant shells include **Baltic tellins**, **cockles** and **mussels**.

Following Jim's excellent and entertaining talk, a Christmas feast of home baked goodies was provided by Nats members. Thanks to everyone who brought food, and a special thanks to Secretary Lorna, who organised the refreshments, including arranging the tempting food display, and transporting several heavy flasks full of hot water, for our teas and coffees. An excellent evening was enjoyed by all.

Jenny Allan

NATIONAL PARKS IN SCOTLAND

Unfinished Business

John Mayhew - 10th December

Despite the concept of National Parks in Scotland having been discussed for over 70 years, it took until 2002 before the first one in Scotland, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, was designated as a National Park. The Cairngorms followed in 2003, with an extension of its boundary in 2010. John Mayhew, as director of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, gave us an overview of the troubled history of National Parks and all the unsuccessful attempts to designate the same areas over the years, as the Nats' contribution to the Afternoon Lecture series.

Historically the story started with the Addison Report in 1931 which looked into the need for National Parks in Britain. Despite its recommendations, which included the Cairngorms, the government of the day decided to take no further action. Much more important was the Ramsay Report, published in 1945 after wartime researches into the need for National Parks in Scotland. Its main recommendations were that five areas be considered: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs; Glen Affric, Glen Cannich and Strath Farrar; Ben Nevis, Glen Coe and Black Mount; The Cairngorms; and Loch Torridon, Loch Maree and Loch Broom. Once again the government decided not to proceed for a mixture of reasons including possible opposition from landowners and the perception that Parks would inhibit developments in forestry and hydro-electric power which were increasingly important in the 1950s.

Subsequent reviews by the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) in the 1970s gave similar recommendations for areas to be considered, but still no action was taken. Also in the 70s the Sandford Committee reviewed the first 20 years of the English and Welsh National Parks and recommended that enjoyment of parks should leave their natural beauty unchanged – which came to be known as the Sandford Principle. The CCS then published another report in 1990 on the Mountain Areas of Scotland, still recommending the same areas for designation as National Parks.

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, one of the earliest pieces of legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament, finally led to the setting up of The Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Parks. The aims of these were: a) to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area; b) to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area; c) to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and d) to promote sustainable economic development of the area's communities.



There is still potential for an increase in the number of National Parks in Scotland very much along the same lines as suggested by the Ramsay Report all those years ago. Further developments in the area of Marine National Parks and other land-based designations are ongoing, but it is just a pity that it has all taken so long. In 2013 the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks published a document called 'Unfinished Business - A National Parks Strategy for Scotland', copies of which were handed out after the lecture, drawing attention to their view that the subject still needs to be taken further.

Anne Reid

MEMBERS' ARTICLES

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS 2015

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

The summer was generally cool with no hot sunny spells but September showed an improvement with sunny days and near frosts overnight at the coast. October remained mild and my runner beans which had been very late to start cropping (end of August) kept on going until the last picking on 1st November when we had still had no real frost. November dawned stormier with mist, fog and rain resulting in snow flurries mid-month after storm Abigail, but there was no real cold weather before the end of the year.

Brian Allan	BA	Monifieth
Margaret Bainbridge	MB	Monifieth
Brian Ballinger	BB	Dundee, West end
Jim Cook	JC	Broughty Ferry
Alban Houghton	AH	Letham, Angus
Daphne Macfarlane Smith	DMS	Broughty Ferry
Jack Moody	JM	Broughty Ferry
Liz Olejnik	LO	Wormit
Margaret Palin	MP	Barnhill, Broughty Ferry
Anne Reid	AR	Monifieth
Brian Williamson	BW	Dundee, Law area

1st January The **snowdrop** that didn't appear last year started to show its head a short time before Christmas and I was fortunate to see the first flower just starting to open on the relatively mild morning of the First. JC.

2nd January Unusual to see four **house sparrows** having a communal bathe in our birdbath. DMS.

5th January A **song thrush** was singing on University of Dundee campus by the Hawkhill. BW.

7th January On Scotsraig Estate, Tayport I saw three **roe deer**, a large **fox**, a **red squirrel**, a **great spotted woodpecker** and a lot of **fieldfares**. LO.

11th January First **aconite** out near back door. DMS.

11th January Snow comes to our garden on The Law and both male and female **blackcaps**. BW.

12th January I was wakened several times very early in the morning by a **dog** barking (with a rather whining, screeching tone) close by, seemingly in the park or perhaps just along the road - and then realised it was a **fox** calling, probably a male trying to find a mate. (I heard it several more times later.) JC.

13th January Woke to find **snow** lying, but not enough to completely cover the grass of the lawn. (NB This was the only time snow settled on our lawn this winter!) DMS.

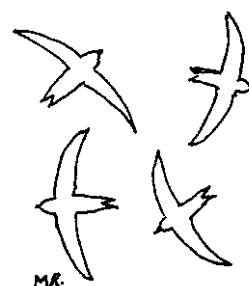
21st January Between Balmerino and Wormit I saw 14 **snipe** in a burn, a **song thrush**, seven **roe deer**, **long tailed tits**, and heard a **woodpecker** tapping. In Wormit Bay among a group of **mallards** was a male **pintail** and there was also a male **merganser** further out. LO.

29th January Saw a **sparrowhawk** being mobbed by two **carriion crows** to the south of us. DMS.

- 30th January** A pair of **bullfinches** were feeding on **cherry** trees on Law Crescent, but then also was surprised to see twelve **magpies** in congregation! **Chaffinch**, **greenfinch**, **goldfinch**, **great tit**, **blue tit**, **blackbird** were all seen around The Law woods. BW.
- 5th February** Seven **fieldfares** flew north over our house. DMS.
- 6th February** A cawing mob of **crows** swirling over a house a short distance along the road caught my attention. Then some **herring gulls** joined in and a **buzzard** flew out. It's only the second time I'd seen one in the area. The bird did several circuits, whilst being harassed constantly, and then disappeared over the roof and away. JC.
- 11th February** After a sunny day our male **blackbird** was singing loudly at dusk, for the first time this year. A **dunnoek** was also heard singing earlier in the day. Signs of spring, at last. AR.
- 16th February** At Boghead Farm by Auchmithie saw **yellowhammer**, **tree sparrow**, **chaffinch**, **blackbird**, **dunnoek**, **reed bunting** and **wood pigeon**, but no **corn buntings** that are sometimes present at this site. BW.
- 21st February** Saw a **buff-tailed bumblebee** queen flying in the garden. Rather early, despite the winter not having been very cold. MB.
- 24th February** Several **frogs** in the garden pond. No spawn yet. BB.
- 27th February** I saw that the **crocuses** were up in full bud on the steep south-facing bank at the start of Dock Street, with a few fully open and lots of other bulbs were showing green leaves. Spring at last? JC.
- 4th March** On a flooded field at Luthrie, Fife saw **wigeon** and **teal**, **greylag** and **pink-footed geese** in the surrounding fields, a few **oystercatchers** and a flock of **starlings** and about 50 **fieldfares** on the hillside near the larches with a **kestrel** hunting overhead. BW.
- 5th March** **Frog spawn** in the garden pond today (it may have been there for a day or two as I have been away.) BB.
- 6th March** A mob of **crows** along the Strips of Craigie in the early afternoon attracted my attention. What was getting them all worked up? It was a **buzzard**, the second I'd seen in the area within the past month. Perhaps it was even the same bird. Is it trying to breed? JC.
- 10th March** Good to hear a **song thrush** singing from a tree at foot of Camphill Road. DMS.
- 11th March** I found my first **buff-tailed bumblebee** of the year, a queen, on a white cardigan on the washing-line - lucky I didn't put her away in a drawer! DMS. (Amazing what turns up on drying washing. Ed.)
- 13th March** A **song thrush** appeared in the garden, after a long absence, and appeared to be investigating the nest site which was used by thrushes last year. AR.
- 15th March** On a 'wall to wall' spring sunshine day on the plateau between Lochs Brandy and Wharral, I spotted two **eagles** soaring along the ridge opposite and two groups of **snow bunting**, nine in one and seven in the other. In all I saw 19 **mountain hares**, some relying on snow patch camouflage but mainly quite timid, justifying the *Lepus timidus* moniker. I was delighted to see them as they do seem scarcer in recent years due to the grouse fraternity culling them since they harbour ticks. AH.
- 20th March** A mostly clear, sunny morning allowed good viewing of projected images of the **solar eclipse** between 9.00am and 10.00am. At its darkest the world looked as it does through sunglasses - a very odd sensation. The shadows of leafy bushes showed the remaining crescent of sunlight in a multiple pattern. To add extra interest, I saw my first **hoverfly** of the spring - a **drone fly**, newly out of hibernation. AR.
- 8th April** First **peacock butterfly** of the year seen in the garden. JC.
- 9th April** Saw my first **sand martin** of the year by the river in Glen Esk, and enjoyed watching **grey wagtails** and **pied wagtails** too. At Tarfside we spotted a **song thrush**, more wagtails, a **dipper** under the bridge, an ascending **skylark** in song, **lapwings** displaying on the heath and **curlews**, **mistle thrushes** and **red grouse** – the two males with lovely red wattles on show. BW.
- 14th April** Heard my first **chiffchaff** of the year calling in Forfar. Its distinctive song was coming from the small wooded hill just south of Academy Street, behind the B&M supermarket. JC.
- 15th April** A **queen wasp** was on the side-door of the garage, possibly collecting slivers of wood for her nest, and I saw my first **early bumblebee**. DMS.



- 16th April** Returned home from shopping to find a **fox** lying in the sun in the middle of the grass at the back of the house. It stayed around, sunning itself, for most of the day and appeared to be fairly old, showing grey hairs around the muzzle. MP.
- 21st April** First **house martin** of the year seen and first **willow warbler** heard at Carsegowniemuir Quarry. JC.
- 23rd April** A visit to Letham Pools, Fife was educational because I saw a **white wagtail** near a **pie** **wagtail** for comparison. **Sand martins** and **swallows** had arrived and **ruff** were feeding at the water's edge. This is a good place to see several wild duck and waders. BW.
- 25th April** Nearing the end of a round of golf at Drumoig, I heard the squeal of a **water rail** from the marshland. Have never heard one there before. DMS.
- 30th April** In Glen Lethnot we watched four **buzzards** on thermals, a flock of about 30 **meadow pipits**, a pair of **wheatears** (first sighting), a pair of **curlews** and a female **merlin** in flight near Hunt Hill, amongst others species. BW.
- 6th May** A **swift** flew over our garden. BW.
- 12th May** A **chiffchaff** could be heard calling from next door's garden. JC.
- 13th May** At 21:36 a **bat** was seen circling the lawn to the north of our house. The previous earliest was on 17th May in 2013. I didn't see one again until 3rd July. DMS.
- 15th May** Near Kingoodie I watched a pair of **sparrowhawks** over an uncropped field and then in pursuit of a **blackbird**. I heard, for the first time this season, a **willow warbler** and a **sedge warbler**. BW.
- 7th June** Our *Cotoneaster horizontalis* was buzzing with **bumblebees** feeding on the tiny flowers - five **early**, three **red-tailed** workers and a queen, one **buff-tailed** queen and five unidentified white-tailed workers. DMS.
- 13th June** **Sulphur polypore** (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), a yellow bracket fungus, was found on a tree stump adjacent to the Fiddler's Path at Dunkeld. This is sometimes called "**chicken polypore**" on account of its culinary taste. JM.
- 18th June** Heard a **magpie** chattering somewhere nearby, the first around here this year. JC.
- 19th June** In Invergowrie Bay at low tide I spotted four **sandwich terns** perched on rocks on the sand. BW.
- 22nd June** A drive up Glen Esk (for the BTO house martin survey) gave **swift**, **sand** and **house martin** and **swallow**. On the river we saw **goosander** (12), **oystercatcher**, **common sandpiper** and **pie** **wagtail**. On the heath and in the woods above Tarfside village there were **lapwings** with juveniles, **curlew**, a pair of **red grouse**, **mistle thrush**, **wheatears** and **snipe**. BW.
- 28th June** Saw first **garden bumblebee**. DMS.
- 4th July** There were 10 **swifts** flying over Nursery Road area - the maximum number this year (maximum was 15 last year). DMS.
- 30th July** Up in Glen Lethnot we saw **redpoll**, **meadow pipit**, **house martin** and **swallow**, **sand martin**, **oystercatcher**, **wheatear**, five **grey wagtails**, two hunting **kestrels** and a **peregrine falcon**, and other woodland species. BW.
- 4th August** My attention was attracted by the raucous cawing of a mob of angry **crows** and saw a **buzzard** low over a large house along Strathern Road. JC.
- 23rd August** Delighted to see a **peacock butterfly** and a **painted lady** in our garden. (Numbers of butterflies on my butterfly transect route at Tentsmuir have been very low this year, about a third of last year probably due to poor weather.) DMS.
- 23rd August** Saw a movement in a large **sycamore** tree not far from the Sweet Burn, which runs into the Dighty. It was difficult to see but probably was a **grey squirrel**. JC.
- 24th August** A **willow warbler** was in our crab-apple tree and then a flock of 30 birds, a mix of **long-tailed** and **blue tits**, flitted through. DMS.
- 26th August** A **silver Y moth** alighted in our porch after being attracted by the light. BW.
- 30th August** A berry bonanza in our garden as a **song thrush**, **blackcaps** (male and female) and a **willow warbler** fed on **berberis** berries. That day at Morton Lochs I enjoyed watching a **red squirrel** eating a large gilled **fungus** held by the stipe, a **common darter dragonfly**, and **comma** and **peacock butterflies**. BW.



30th August Very excited to see a **comma** butterfly on our variegated **buddleia** (the only other one was on 31st August 2013) along with five **red admirals**, two **painted ladies** and a **small white**. DMS.

7th September The broken shell of a large **garden snail** (*Helix aspersa*) appeared on the back doorstep. It's good to know that at least one **thrush** is still around. JC.

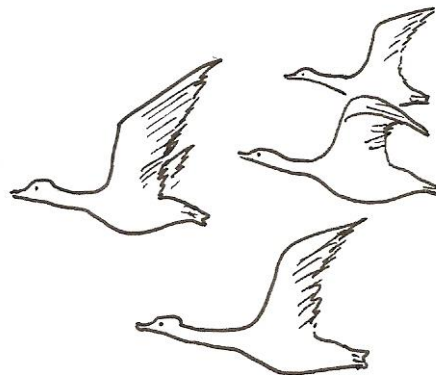
8th September At Eden Estuary I watched two **kingfishers** chasing up and down the river, three **ospreys** at the outer estuary, a **peregrine falcon** with its juvenile on the old mill, a **little egret**, **redshank** (c 100), a **greenshank** outside the hide, and all the usual **gulls** and **finches**, **tits** and **tree sparrows** on the feeders. BW.

17th September A large skein of **pink-foot geese** flew high over Carsegowniemuir quarry, the first I've seen there this year. JC.

23rd September Late in the morning I heard an 'odd' harsh noise so went out and found it was emanating from a **grey squirrel** hanging head-down on the roughcast near the top of our neighbour's chimney! DMS.

26th September My first sighting of about 50 **pink-footed geese** at very high altitude flying south. BW.

27th September A **grey squirrel** was seen running across the Arbroath Road, expertly dodging the busy traffic, between Gotterstone Drive and Dawson Park late in the afternoon. JC.



28th September During the night a rare supermoon total eclipse occurred. Unfortunately the sky was hazy so, though we could make out the outline at 3:46am, the moon did not appear blood-red. By 4am, brightness was appearing at the left side. DMS.

3rd October Three **buzzards** circling high over Seaview School, Monifieth in mid afternoon. They continue to become more plentiful. BA. (Two more, or the same ones, over Monifieth High School the following day. AR.)

13th October Heard the first of this year's "tseesp" sounds, the soft contact calls of flying **redwings**, after dark over the city centre. JC.

19th October Several very large and noisy skeins of **pink-foot geese** flew high over the house, heading south-west, just as the light was fading. JC.

21st October Over 300 **starlings** were lining the wires above the pig farm beside the Drumoig golf course. DMS.

25th October Flowering **ivy** on a bank near the Seven Arches had attracted a queen **buff-tailed bumblebee** and several **wasps**. AR.

28th October A single **redwing** was taking rowan berries with the **blackbirds** in our garden. A single redwing returned for rowan berries for the next three days, and again for six days in November. BW.

1st November A walk in Scotsraig Estate, Tayport rewarded by sightings of **redwings** and **mistle thrushes**, four species of **tits**, **blackbird**, **robin** and **chaffinch**, amongst others. BW.

4th November A **magpie** chattered for a few minutes in a dense conifer in the garden; the first time I'd heard one in the vicinity for a considerable time. JC.

19th November At Loch of Kinnordy I was pleased to see **snipe**, about 100 **fieldfares**, around 300 **lapwings**, a **redpoll** and all the usual ducks. BW.

29th November There was a light covering of snow. It only lasted a day in our garden but Craigowl (visible in the distance) was white for a few days. DMS.

1st December A **grey squirrel** was seen in some trees on the site of the old Longhaugh Quarry, close to the Dighty. JC.

1st December Delighted to see an exceptional number and variety of birds in our garden - 18 **goldfinches**, 15 **greenfinches** (very unusual to have so many), two **blackbirds**, six **blue tits**, six **chaffinches**, two **carion crows**, a **coal tit**, a **dunnock**, two **goldcrests**, two **great tits**, a **robin**, a **wood pigeon**, a **wren** and a female **blackcap**! DMS.

14th December On a cold and damp day in the garden was pleased to see five **long-tailed tits**, **coal tit**, **blue tit** and **great tit**, a male **blackcap** (now daily visitor), **chaffinch**, **greenfinch**, **blackbird** and **house sparrow**. BW.

18th December While staying down south, in Hungerford, went for a drive and saw a clump of **daffodils** on the verge fully out! My sister, near Woodstock, has had **snowdrops** out for a

few weeks. This follows weeks of mild weather (12-14°C) down there while, in Dundee area, temperatures have tended to be about 5°C! DMS.

20th December A **great spotted woodpecker** came to the peanut feeder. BW.

24th December Briefly saw a few roughly **starling**-sized birds in a tree at the edge of the Eastern Cemetery beside the Arbroath Road. I think they had crests and could have been **waxwings**. JC.

31st December Heard and then saw a **magpie** perched in a tree down Holly Road and next glimpsed a **buzzard** twisting in flight as it tried to avoid three **carriion crows** which were mobbing it. Also saw the first **aconite** of winter in our garden. DMS.

BIRD WATCHING ON ISLAY

A visit to Islay in March to see the over-wintering geese has been a wish that came true this year. Alban Houghton and I took the ferry to Port Askaig on the sheltered Sound of Islay and enjoyed the sightings of **great northern diver**, **common guillemot**, **kittiwake**, and **black guillemot** before the ferry docked. Looking across the Sound to Jura we were delighted to see a **white-tailed eagle** and a **golden eagle** simultaneously soaring over the Paps of Jura.

On the main road to Bridgend (on Loch Indaal) we stopped several times to look at the hundreds of **barnacle geese** and **white-fronted geese** from west Greenland, small flocks of **redwing** and on the shores of Loch Indaal we found **pale-bellied brent geese** from eastern Canada. It is notable that the barnacle geese coming to Islay each year are a different population to those that visit Dumfries and Galloway from Svalbard in Artic Norway. We learned how the white-fronted geese that breed in west Greenland must gain height to cross the 3,000 metre-high Greenland ice cap and on to Iceland for three weeks of feeding before completing their journey to Islay. The juveniles are only 10 weeks old when they make this hazardous journey with the parent geese!

After this memorable first day a serious storm lashed the island overnight and much of the next day, but we took shelter in the RSPB hides on the west side of Loch Gruinart and observed wildfowl and waders struggling to feed and take cover on the strips of vegetation amongst the scrapes and marshes of the reserve. **Barnacle geese**, **white-fronted geese**, **greylag geese**, **lapwing**, **greenshank**, a **heron** (with bill showing breeding colours), **teal**, **wigeon**, **shelduck**, **pintail**, **gadwall**, flocks of **starlings**, **pied wagtail** and **meadow pipit** were all seen here. Out of the strong winds amongst the moss-covered trees and **gorse** bushes on the reserve we recorded **treecreeper**, **wren**, **song thrush**, **finches**, and other woodland birds. After an obligatory visit to Kilchoman Distillery for hot food (just food? Ed.) we spotted a pair of **choughs** on the barn roof, a first for me! A drive to Ardnave Point that afternoon to view **choughs** in their preferred habitat amongst large eroded sand dunes and dune slacks grazed by cattle and sheep was cut short because of gale-force winds, but we saw a few choughs flying expertly in the winds above the dunes. **Ravens** are also a constant feature of the corvid population here, with **hooded crows**, **rooks**, **jackdaws** and a few **carriion crows**, but **magpies** are rare on the island.



The Oa (pronounced Oh!) peninsula on the south coast is managed entirely by the RSPB for the conservation of pastureland birds and the coastal cliff scenery is a splendid habitat for **golden eagles** and **peregrines**. We were unlucky that day and missed these raptors, but were rewarded with displays by **ravens** and **choughs**, flocks of **fieldfares** and **starlings** and a few **twite**. **Fulmars** and **gannets** roamed the ocean beneath the cliffs, and **wild goats** grazed the precipitous grassy ledges below us as we walked out to see the American Monument that commemorates the loss at sea of the troop ships *Tuscania* and *Otranto*. Further

east near Port Ellen, on Kilnaughton Bay, we enjoyed watching the fishing behaviour of a **red-throated diver** (winter plumage) and a pair of **great northern divers**, **shag** and **black guillemots**. That day we worked eastwards past all the famous distilleries to view the coves and rocks along the SE shoreline. **Harbour seals**, **wigeon**, **shelduck**, **oystercatchers**, **great northern divers**, **red-**

breasted merganser, shag, heron, mallard, curlew, turnstones and **redshank** were common, along with the usual **gulls**, but excitement increased with the sighting of a **female hen harrier** (a 'ring-tail') near Kildalton Church. Above Claggan Bay at the end of the public road we enjoyed more **great northern divers**, six **great black-backed gulls** around a lobster-fishing boat, diving **shag** and **black guillemots** - but a pair of the latter birds puzzled us because they still sported their striped and blotched black-and-white winter plumage.

A final visit to the RSPB Loch Gruinart Reserve in late afternoon rewarded us with splendid views of hundreds of geese returning to roost, and then the show-stopper when a large flock of **golden plover**, some in summer plumage and accompanied by **dunlin** wheeled in the sky and settled on the marsh. At a nearby farm we had another close-sighting of a female **hen harrier**. This winter visit to Islay was a birdwatchers' delight, tempered only by some serious stormy weather that gave little opportunity for us to see some expected sea ducks, such as **scoters** and **scaup**, amongst the furious waves on Loch Indaal.

A daily account of birds seen on Islay can be viewed at: islaybirds.blogspot.com.

Brian Williamson

GARDEN TREE SPARROWS

In October 2012 my garden was visited by **tree sparrows**, for the first time ever in over 20 years of recording. I saw a maximum of two of the birds, amongst the resident **house sparrows**, and they only stayed for a few days. In 2013 I was alert to the possibility of tree sparrows visiting again and they duly appeared on almost the same date in October as the previous year. This time they stayed for just over two weeks with between one and three birds seen at any one time.

By 2014 I was almost expecting tree sparrows to turn up in the garden again. After an anxious wait one finally appeared at my garden feeders on 22nd October, about a week later than the previous years. After this, the next date noted was 27th October when two birds appeared and I photographed them. I was then away for a week and, after I came home, I first noticed a colour ringed bird on 7th November - light blue over yellow (left) and yellow over metal (right) - it was helpfully on the peanut feeder with legs splayed and rings in full view! More photographs were taken. At this point I discovered that the photos taken a week earlier actually showed the ringed bird, which I had not noticed at the time! Tree sparrows have an infuriating habit of crouching low when feeding so that the legs, and any rings, are not visible without very careful observation, so, once I knew there was a ringed bird about I spent a lot of time looking out of the window.

All tree sparrows in the garden were recorded over the winter, with a maximum of 7 birds seen together on 14th January 2015. The colour-ringed bird was seen regularly over the whole period, though not daily. For most of the period I made daily observations, with the exception of the week 29th October to 5th November.

Month	No of days tree sparrows seen	No of days ringed bird seen	Maximum no of tree sparrows
October	2	1	2
November	17	10	2
December	23	7	4
January	29	14	7
February	24	16	3
March	12	10	2

As soon as I realised I had a ringed bird in the garden I set about finding out its origins. This can often be quickly done if the ringer has recorded their colour ringing scheme on the www.cr-birding.org website, with very swift confirmation often available by e-mail. If not listed here an enquiry can be made via the BTO, who have full records of all ringing projects in the UK and they follow up those from abroad. The ringed tree sparrow was not on any of the listed ringing schemes, and none of my local Tay Ringing Group contacts knew of anyone colour-ringing tree sparrows, so I sent the record to the BTO who came back with the details of my bird.

Somewhat surprisingly the bird had been ringed in a garden in Stanley, near Perth in mid May 2014 as part of a brood of five chicks, and was last seen there on 10th June 2014. It would be fascinating to know where it went before turning up in my garden in late October. I last saw the ringed bird on 17th March in my garden and wondered whether it had really departed or it just that I had failed to observe it. This was resolved a few days later when the ringer sent me an e-mail to say that the bird had returned to Stanley by 21st March, was exhibiting male behaviour and was setting up home in a nest box close to the one he had been reared in. The four days taken to travel the 25 miles from Monifieth to Stanley seems quite a feat for such a small bird, but one of the reasons for ringing studies is to find out movement and migration patterns of birds, with colour ring studies enabling non-ringers to gather useful data with only binoculars and a camera.

I look forward to seeing whether tree sparrows visit my garden again in 2015 and wonder if the colour-ringed bird will reappear. Apparently the adult birds tend to remain in the nesting area while the young birds disperse, as happened here. Watch this space!

Anne Reid

Postscript: The ringed **tree sparrow** (shown, right, on my feeder) set up home in a box near to the one where it was reared and turned out, by behaviour, to be a male (no visible difference between sexes). By May 2015 two chicks had hatched but he then deserted the female and disappeared. The female reared these two to fledging. The cool summer seemed to affect breeding and the Stanley garden pairs did not produce the usual second and third broods and left the garden.

In October 2015 I once again recorded a single tree sparrow on the 28th. One or two individuals were then seen until 11th December, with none seen since. The winter of 2014-15 seems to have been atypical, on the limited evidence I have, but it was quite exciting to have the ringed bird present in my garden all that winter.

Anne Reid



DAWN OF THE CHORUS

Broughty Ferry - January to March

Sunday 18th January I heard the first good territorial calls of a **great tit** in the garden and next door during the morning. Surely too early, yet, to be the first sign of spring?

Thursday 5th February A **blackbird** was singing loudly in the back garden in the early evening - just tuning up for territory and a mate.

Friday 13th February Soon after 5am on a calm, dull and relatively mild morning, I was woken by a **blackbird** singing strongly just outside the bedroom window, perhaps perched on the edge of the roof above. It carried on for about 10 to 15 minutes and then shut up shop. Later, soon after 7am, a **robin** started up its rather thin reedy territorial song, to be joined later, as the light grew stronger, by several **blue tits**. Only very much later, well after 9am, did I hear a **great tit** calling. The earlier times of dawn are causing the choral union to start tuning up!

Sunday 15th February Soon after 6am a **song thrush** was heard singing strongly in the distance, giving its characteristic repeated calls. It's good to know that they're still around and (probably) breeding. A short time later a **robin** joined in from the garden and, as I dozed off again, several robins were doing their best.

Saturday 21st February On a calm but cold morning a **blackbird** was singing strongly, trilling and fluting, in the garden soon after 6am, with the thin trills of several **robins** in the background. The twittering of several **blue tits** and the distinctive 'pink-pinks' of **chaffinches** could be heard as the sun

came up at about 8am and the calls of a **greenfinch** a little later. Still a bit early in the season for a full dawn chorus, but soon.....

Friday 27th February Well before dawn, at about 5am on a calm and relatively mild morning, two **blackbirds** were singing in competition, no doubt proclaiming their territorial boundaries to each other and all eligible females in the vicinity. Some scratchy-sounding **robins** had been sounding earlier and then, a while after the blackbirds, a **chaffinch** joined in and a few **blue tits**. Possibly the thin song of a **dunnock** could be heard as well. Later still the rather monotonous repeating calls of a **collared dove** were added in and the cawing of a pair of **carriion crows**.

Sunday 8th March A **blackbird** was singing strongly in the garden well before dawn, a little before five, and then a few **robins** joined in. The weather was calm and clear early on, with only a slight frost. A **chaffinch** or perhaps two started up a short while later and then what sounded faintly like a very distant **thrush**. Several **crows** cawed in the dawn stillness and a few tinkles of **goldfinches** announced their presence. After a time, a **blue tit** or two twittered away but only much later did I hear a **great tit**. Later still, what was probably a **greenfinch** a short distance away joined in and much later, at around eight o'clock, came the repetitive coo-cooing of a **collared dove**. A reasonable dawn (and later) chorus at last!

Monday 16th March In the pre-dawn darkness at about 4.30 on a rather damp and windy morning, three **blackbirds** were singing lustily, two near-by and the other in the distance. A short while later a couple of **robins** joined in and then a **crow** cawed loudly several times. A full-blown dawn chorus - for this area - developed. Later on at least one **collared dove** joined in and then some calls from what could have been **blue tits**. Later still, the distinctive trills of a **chaffinch** could be heard. Only very much later, at around 8am, did a **great tit** start its repetitive territorial sing-song.

Tuesday 31st March At about 4am on a wet and very windy morning the very welcome sweet and repeating notes of a **song thrush** rose above the wintry blast. A long while later, as the wind eased, a **blackbird** joined in and later still, a **robin**.

Jim Cook

GLEN ESK IN SPRINGTIME

13th May

A slow ride up Glen Esk on a sunny day proved very rewarding. The first stop (about 1km north of Auchmull) gave easy access to old birch woodland and a path down to the River Esk with abundant **primroses** and **violets** in blossom and **dog's mercury** and **bugle** soon to open their flowers. **Willow warbler**, **great tit**, **chaffinch** and **robin** were singing, and a **cuckoo** called on the hill. **Swallows** and **sand martins** cruised above the river and over the trees. Just 1km south of the Retreat, in a large embankment at the roadside, we were delighted to see **sand martins** occupying about 20 nest holes, some still excavating holes and others departing in hunting sorties, despite the presence of loads of gravel recently dumped for road repairs.



At Tarfside we turned north on a minor moorland road that gives fine views across much of the Millden Estate. Many **lapwings** were displaying and setting up territories, **oystercatchers**, **wheatear**, **meadow pipit**, **mistle thrush**, **pied wagtail** and **red grouse** were all seen and a **curlew** called. At Tarfside we lingered by the bridge and found **mallard** in the water, a pair of **grey wagtails** on the mossy rocks and a **dipper** on a side stream feeding. More **sand martins** were nesting in a bank up the track.

A brisk walk through the woods along the river up to Loch Lee gave sightings of **willow warblers**, **meadow pipits** and **pied wagtails**, and beside the castle a **grasshopper warbler** called from a **willow** tree. Around the Estate properties at Loch Lee many **mistle thrushes** and **blackbirds** were feeding and **swallows** and **sand martins** flew overhead and across the Loch. A pair of **common sandpipers** flew across the meadow, alighted on the wall and then took up position beside the water.

I scanned the hillside for **ring ouzel** that I knew were residents, and then realised that the black bird feeding near the track close by was actually a female **ring ouzel**! Then a male started to call from a prominent rock on the hillside and I managed to find him in the telescope. Over a period of ten minutes I probably saw about six **ring ouzels**! This craggy hillside is well-known for this charming summer visitor from Morocco, but this was my first experience in Glen Esk. My excitement increased when I noticed that only a few metres away there was a sleepy **bat** (probably a **pipistrelle**) basking in sunshine on top of the large rock beside Loch Lee.

Brian Williamson

THE MAIDEN PINK

The delicate and rare **maiden pink** (*Dianthus deltoides*), is an elusive, native plant, mostly found growing in coastal duneland, but the plant occasionally occurs in a few inland habitats. From late May to July, mats of low growing *D. deltoides* plants with deep pink flowers, can be found growing in established dunelands at St Cyrus Nature Reserve, a favourite summer venue for Nats outings.

Around two decades ago, at Corbie Knowe at the southern end of Lunan Bay, a few clumps of **maiden pink** arrived, and became established in the short duneland turf surrounding the huts and caravans. Sadly, this welcome addition to an excellent diverse flora, including **meadow saxifrage**, *Saxifraga granulata*, and **lesser meadow rue**, *Thalictrum minus*, has now been reduced to a single plant, but a few established maiden pink plants are still thriving on the cliffs near the tiny settlement at Ethiehaven.

Local Botanist William Gardiner, who wrote the original Flora of Forfarshire published in 1847, was so thrilled to discover maiden pink plants flowering on the cliffs at Red Head that he was inspired to write a poem which he included in his Flora:-

THE MAIDEN PINK *Dianthus deltoides*

Upon the Red Head's dizzy brink
The Maiden Pink doth take her stand,
Like some fair nymph, whose ardent eye
Looks forth upon the ocean bland.

'Tis summer, and the gentle waves
Flow smoothly on towards the shore:
And that fond maiden looks, and hopes,
And sighs, for him she doth adore.

Yet, though so near his native land,
And she he loves within his view,
A storm may burst, and, in the deep,
Engulf the ship and all its crew!

Then, Maiden Pink, thou teachest us,
That joys in prospect may deceive us;
Till Time his passport hath bestowed,
To that bright land where nought shall grieve us.



The Monifieth sand dunes east of Balmossie, have a colourful summer flora, including a few rarities. We were counting the spikes of rare **creeping bellflower**, *Campanula rapunculoides*, sadly in decline and now in single figures, when we came across a few flowers of **maiden pink**. A search found several more flowering clumps, all apparently thriving, but confined to one small area. Presumably the seeds arrived on birds' feet, since the plant has no other obvious methods of seed dispersal. We were delighted to find maiden pink plants growing locally.

Brian and Jenny Allan

Photographs of *Dianthus deltoides* and *Campanula rapunculoides* at Monifieth in colour on page 25.

THE TRAIL CAM IN THE QUARRY

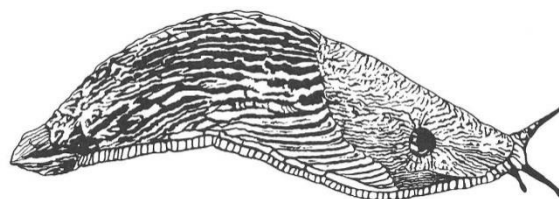
June and October

During two separate periods, a week in June and a fortnight in October, the trail camera was fixed to the trunk of a dead **gean** close to the site of the 'mouse amphitheatre'. The ground and trees in view were baited with nuts, grain, several apples and other 'goodies'. An interesting array of wildlife turned up to enjoy the bounty, although none were new to the quarry (we can only wait in hope!).

During the single week in June (from the 12th to the 19th) the camera recorded 90 15-second video clips. Of these only 12 recorded nothing and were deleted. The remaining 78 clips yielded views of **wood mice** (24% of the total), **bank voles** (4%), **blackbirds** (female 10% and male 13% but, interestingly, never together), many good views of **rabbits** (21%), **wood pigeons** on the ground in among the trees (19%), a brief glimpse of a **stoat** after one of the **wood pigeons** and, by far the most enchanting, an alert and elegant young **roe deer**. On a single occasion, a **pheasant** appeared but obviously was very nervous and continually looking at something off-camera.

After a false start, the fortnight in October, from 1st to 15th, recorded a total of 163 15-second clips, not counting those recorded in setting up the site which were deleted. The camera this time was pointed at the trunk of a large **gean** that had been sprinkled with bird seed and a few peanuts. Of the 163 clips a considerable number - 83 - showed nothing at all and also were deleted, leaving a total of 80. On reflection, perhaps the sensor has a wider field than the lens and thus detects small animals at the edge of the field which never move into view of the lens. The most numerous sightings by far were those of night-time tree-climbing **wood mice** (86%), a few partial views of **rabbits** and **pheasants** plus single sightings of a **jay**, a **great spotted woodpecker** and, of all things, a very brief glimpse of a low-flying **bat**! It was only a metre or so above the ground under a dense leaf canopy. Both the **woodpecker** and **jay** were interested in the peanuts and probably the **pheasants** were as well. In fact the **woodpecker** was the first visitor recorded - arriving only a short time after the camera was set up and baited. The **wood mice** mostly appeared one at a time and it seems that there were at least three different individuals, distinguished by slight differences in size and colour (one was rather darker). When two mice appeared together they showed themselves to be highly antagonistic and almost immediately one chased the other out of view. It was interesting to see that mice are able to climb the nearly vertical trunk almost as fast as they can run down. As might be expected, the mice appeared only at night and always showed signs of nervousness, probably because they were so exposed on the trunk and far from cover. Most were recorded on the first night (16 times and starting late, after midnight) and second night (15 times, one clip recording two together but only very briefly). A total of seven clips of mice were recorded during the third night and eight on the fourth night. After that the numbers dropped usually to only a few seen each night and on some nights to none at all.

Interestingly, on some clips a few **insects** and other small invertebrates could be seen. In June what was probably a small **hunting spider** was recorded trying to leap on a **fly** and several flying insects could be seen on other clips. In October, as well as a few flying insects, **slugs** could be seen on several occasions on the tree trunk during obviously wet nights.



Jim Cook

A NIGHT OF METEORS AND FOXES

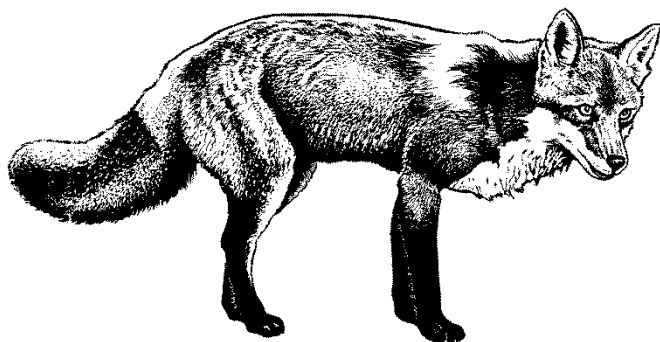
12th August

The night was advertised as 'good conditions for the meteor shower' and I was hopeful that there would be a great display of Perseid shooting stars without a bright moon. These meteors (in reality, tiny dust particles entering the atmosphere at hypersonic speed) all seemed to be centred on and around the constellation Perseus and moved away in all directions against the dark sky. It turned out to be an interesting evening, though not in the way expected.

I was standing quietly at the back door, soon after dark, to look out for any signs of meteors, and there in the shadows was a movement. A large **fox** had appeared at the side of the house. The animal provided just a glimpse as it disappeared. It wasn't late and dark enough for meteors, though the sky was good and clear. Much later, nearer midnight, I was sitting outside, warmly clad, in a

garden chair (with binoculars, just in case) to keep a watch for 'shooting star' activities. The problem was that the previously cloudless sky had clouded over and it was difficult to obtain a clear view.

The night watch wasn't entirely wasted, though. After a while I noticed a movement on the drive and there was a large and handsome **fox**, clearly visible in the street lights as he confidently and nonchalantly trotted up. But then he stopped abruptly. Obviously he'd realised that something just wasn't right. I'm fairly sure that he didn't see me and I certainly wasn't making any noise but perhaps a breath of wind carried my scent to his nose. For a moment or two he paused, giving a good clear view, and then about turned and melted silently into the shadows. I wondered if it was the same one as earlier.



And were there any meteors worth the wait and watch? Over a period

of more than half an hour there were perhaps a dozen faint streaks of light in the patches of open sky. I was able to catch a glimpse of only one bright meteor trail. It had been a rather disappointing evening - but only for the anticipated meteoritic spectaculars.

Jim Cook

BLAIRGOWRIE BEAVERS

13th August

Walking the River Ericht footpath downstream of Blairgowrie at about 20:30, I saw at least two **beavers**, one probable adult plus a juvenile (probably a 2014 kit, definitely not full-grown) swimming. When they saw me walking along the riverbank, they both made a beeline towards me, the juvenile approaching to within about three metres, the other keeping a little more distance. After about a minute, the adult tail-slapped and disappeared, but the juvenile ignored this warning and continued to watch me for a couple more minutes. Eventually it got fed up looking at me, and swam off. Nearby, there were a couple of people with cameras and tablets hoping to photograph or film the beavers. They are obviously a well-known attraction locally, and, from their behaviour, I suspect they may be accustomed to members of the public feeding them. I also saw **kingfisher** farther downstream.

Colin McLeod

HUNTING OWLS AT ELLIOT

25th November

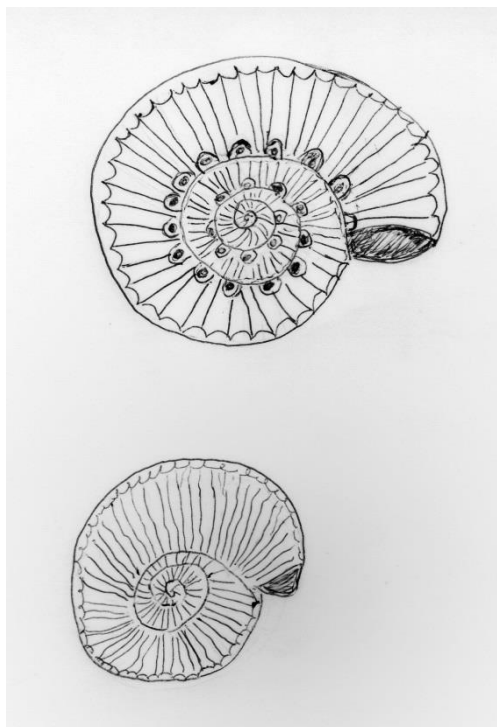
I am not usually moved to follow news on the grape vine that a special bird has arrived at a particular location, but I must confess that the news that some **short-eared owls** were hunting in broad daylight, as is their habit, stirred me to investigate. Arriving at Elliot, alongside the Arbroath Golf Course and railway, at 2.00pm after watching **long-tailed ducks**, **red-throated divers**, **common scoter** and **sanderlings** at Redcastle on Lunan Bay, we noted several photographers spread out in the rough ground of the course and between the rail line and the coast. Five **short-eared owls** were hunting across this area completely ignoring the photographers, golfers and passing trains. However, the owls took exception to a lone hunting **kestrel** on their patch. This was a thrilling experience because the owls' silent flights came within 20 metres of us whilst we kept perfectly still beside a gorse bush. One owl plunged into the rough ground nearby and we heard the squeak of an unfortunate vole before the owl landed on a post only 30 metres away where it stayed for several minutes surveying the terrain. Meanwhile a **wren** hopped on to the gorse bush, **linnets** and **goldfinches** flocked on another bush, a **stonechat** alighted on a dead **rosebay willowherb** stem and a **snipe** launched itself high in the sky.

Brian Williamson

THE KIMMERIDGE LEGACY

The tiny, picturesque village of Kimmeridge nestles in a valley within the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset. The nearby coastline forms part of the famous Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site and a Mecca for students of geology. We declined to pay the local landowner's £5 toll to drive the short ¾mile distance along a private road to the beach, and instead parked for free in the village car park, alongside several coaches and minibuses, used to convey students and schoolchildren to the site as part of their studies. We followed the well-signed coastal path, and soon found ourselves overlooking the beach, which, as expected was full of students, some examining the exposed tidal rocks, others engaged in recording detailed 'vertical lithologies' of cliff sections.

Dominating the scene, the Perenco 'Nodding Donkey', situated above the cliffs on the west side of the bay (Photograph, right, by Brian Allan), continuously pumps oil from the Kimmeridge Oil Field. The oil well was installed in 1959. Initially the well pumped more than 100,000 gallons of crude oil every week, but this has steadily declined in recent years to a level of around 14,350 gallons per week. The Kimmeridge Clay Formation underlies a large area of Southern England. The fossiliferous Kimmeridge Bay cliffs are largely composed of black carbon-rich Kimmeridge Oil Shales. A recent cliff fall demonstrated the instability of these soft, eroding shales. The same Jurassic rock formations can also be found in outcrops on the East Yorkshire coastal cliffs. The Kimmeridge oil shales are the main 'source' rock for our North Sea oil and gas reserves. The high organic content of these shales was retained when they were laid down in oxygen deficient conditions, more than 140 million years ago, subsequently becoming buried deeper within the Earth's crust, as they were overlain by later sediment layers. Heat and pressure released the oil which became trapped within porous 'reservoir rocks', capped by impermeable clay deposits.



On the shore we ate our packed lunches, seated on a natural stone bench, with several sea-smoothed large **ammonite** fossils within the rock. Several species of these ancient fossil relatives of present day marine **nautilus** species can be found here, including in situ *Aulacostephanus* (left, top) and *Pectinatites* species (left, below) on the foreshore rocks. A closer inspection of the cliffs also revealed plentiful smaller fossil **bivalve** species, similar to present day **clams** and **cockles**. Rarely, skeletal remains of **dinosaurs** and **pterosaurs**, including teeth, have been found here. The beach platform and cliffs have SSSI status, which forbids hammering or defacing of in situ fossils, although collecting fossils from loose rocks and pebbles is still permitted.

As I write this, planning permission is being sought to release Kimmeridge Shale-derived oil and gas, via 'fracking', in a scenic part of The Weald in West Sussex, and further east, to develop more oil wells. Both of these proposed developments are in areas of outstanding natural beauty and are being vigorously opposed by environmental groups.

*December 2015: Prime Minister David Cameron gave permission to grant licences to explore 159 blocks of land in England for fracking. Three National Parks and five

'areas of outstanding natural beauty' could potentially be affected by his decision.

Jenny Allan

RAMBLES WITH STEVIE 2015

2015 started off slowly. **Blue, great, long-tailed** and **coal tits**, **house sparrows** and **starlings** in the garden - I'm sure the 40 odd **starlings** discourage anything else. No **blackcaps**, **chaffinches**, **goldfinches** or **tree sparrows** so far. So, a visit to Glenshee was planned, to photograph **red deer** and other winter wildlife in the snow. As we walked along Jock's Road beside the lively flowing river, I suddenly became aware of a vehicle close behind us, which we hadn't heard for the noise of the water. I swiftly stepped up onto the heather covered bank to let it pass, but Jim, who was slightly ahead on the other side with the dogs, took a few seconds more to reel them in on their extending leads. While the car paused as Jim got the dogs onto the bank at his side, the driver waved to me to acknowledge our actions and I responded in kind. As I made eye contact, I was stunned to realise I was waving back to Prince Charles. How lovely to see him taking a break to enjoy the area.

February arrived and we were still repeatedly visiting Balgavies to try to photograph the **water rail**. We decided to change tactics; our best option being to stake out for as long as it took, so, warmly wrapped and with handwarmers festooned about my person, we settled into the hide. The loch was frozen and one of the six **herons** on the opposite bank, presumably a youngster, surely hadn't seen ice before and landed on the frozen surface, only for its legs to go out from under it. After



Dipper

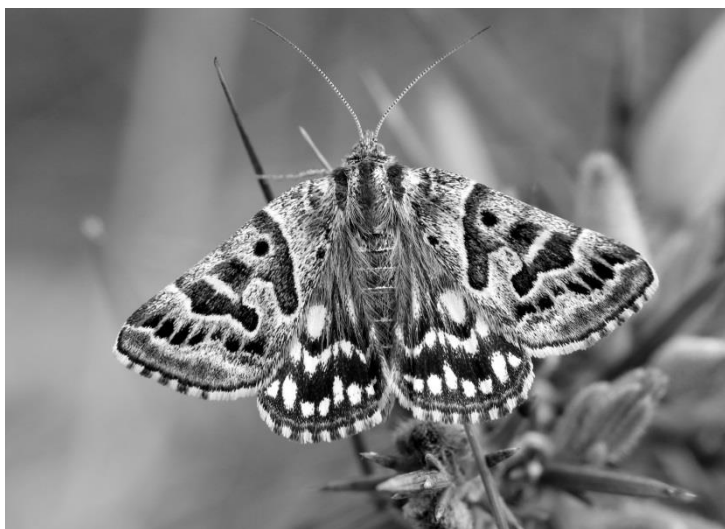
several hours, having enjoyed a **great spotted woodpecker** and a flock of **long-tailed tits** side by side, plus various other birds and **squirrels** at the feeders, I got a bit restless and went to check on the tiny **green elf cup** fungus we had spotted a couple of days previously, a short way up the path, hoping to return some circulation to my chilled feet too. Unsurprisingly in the 10 minutes I was gone, the **water rail** appeared and Jim was able to take several images of it. Yes, I missed it again! A trip to the Lurgies at Montrose Basin for **kingfishers** was very successful, in that not only did we spot two of them but we also managed to watch and take photos of an ermine **stoat**. Dog-walking along St Vigeans Den, I noted a pair of **dippers** with beakfuls of food and sure enough, once I was some way along the path, one flew into a gap in the wall. February seemed rather early for hatchlings. (Dippers nest early as their aquatic food is readily available. Ed.)

Later in spring we visited St Cyrus and witnessed a battle between raptors. Undeterred by a mobbing, screeching **peregrine**, the **buzzard** continued to carry in nesting material. There was also a bit of a "domestic" in the garden nestbox, where a female **sparrow** repeatedly brought out an unwanted feather, which the male proceeded to pick up and return to the nest. A weekend in Glasgow to visit 'The Progeny' (as our two offspring like to think of themselves!) found us at popular Hogganfield Loch, where we enjoyed both **whooper** and **mute swans** as well as **tufted ducks**, **goldeneye** and **goosanders** - all eating bread but what a great way to introduce youngsters to wildlife. On returning home at night, we heard the fabulous sound of **whooper swans** flying overhead in the pitch black above our cottage. The following day we visited Glenesk, where we saw 33 noisily whooping it up in Loch Lee. Wonder if they were the same flock? A good day for the reptiles and amphibians too, with two **adders**, a **slow worm**, a **lizard** and two **newts**. Dog-walking along Waulkmills nature trail, I heard bird noise I was unfamiliar with and found the source was a pair of courting **great spotted woodpeckers**, absolutely charming and so different from their everyday calls. Further along the path, we came across a **grey heron**, 'wings akimbo', sunbathing.

Late spring and a long-awaited return to the Caribbean islands for a bit of early heat. Little variety of wildlife however, apart from marine, though we made the most of what we encountered. **Turtles**, **barracuda**, **dolphins**, small **whales**, **corals** and exotic multi-coloured **fish** which we enjoyed photographing while snorkelling. **Parrot fish**, so large and so close, we could barely fit them in the frame, munching noisily on the **coral**. A **conch**, gliding along, then digging itself into the sand. Sharp-eyed Jim also spotted a **lobster** which we tried to entice out from its refuge to have its photo taken too - fairly successfully. Various **lizards** are common on these islands, especially assorted **iguanas**, which are particularly unfazed by humans. These are also traditionally eaten and taste similar to chicken apparently. **Egrets** are very common and there seemed to be at least three species. A favourite though are the startlingly bright turquoise blue **lizards** on Aruba - absolutely no camouflage there.

May. After a lifetime of camping, we have now taken to caravanning, making our first jaunt to Bedale, midway between the Yorkshire dales and moors. Sunshine was forecast, however, on arriving, we were met with torrential rain. Thunder and lightning in a caravan is only marginally better than in a tent! But every cloud has a silver lining and we were rewarded with the area's stunning waterfalls in full spate. The weather settled and we enjoyed the pretty little site we had chosen with its wildlife pond, where we were delighted to see teneral **damsels**, both **large red** and **blue-tailed**, and entertaining **moorhen** chicks. A cob **mute swan** ruled the roost, attacking any **goose** which tried to enter his territory and we watched aghast as it tried to drown a **gosling** by pinning it under the water. The outcome was unknown as I couldn't bear to watch actually. A **green-veined white butterfly** dared to intimidate black **St Mark's flies** and soon found itself harried by at least 10 of them - extraordinary behaviour. We also witnessed a **carion crow** mercilessly chase, kill and eat a young **rabbit**. The caravan is virtually a mobile hide, where we can watch in comfort.

June arrived and still no sign of **small blue butterflies** on my monitoring patch at Elliot, though they were present as usual along Carnoustie golf course. However, I did spot a very stunning **Mother Shipton moth**, in excellent condition - another for that square for the moth atlas (Photograph, below, Stevie Smith). Jim humoured me trying to photograph **ghost swift moths** lekking in the field



behind our house by aiming our car lights towards them - will try again next year! A weekend in Glencoe and a return to Glasdrum Woods had a great result of several **chequered skipper butterflies** and a **speckled yellow moth**. The sights in Glen Etive horrified us - not only had the **red deer** been cleared again, but due to extensive logging, the landscape was devastated. Closer to home, we headed for St Cyrus and having identified the location of the **peregrine's** nest, returned the following day with long lenses on cameras, only to find the young had fledged, the youngsters flapping round the clifftop, complaining noisily,

scrambling and hopping but not yet airborne.

Summer and, as usual, we took off for Dorset. Every visit gives us something different to marvel over and this year was no exception with photos of a **mottled beefly** at Arne RSPB reserve and **broad-bodied chasers** at Slop Bog. The new owners at the campsite asked if I would kindly go round with the assessor from the David Bellamy award scheme since I was so familiar with the site and its wildlife - which I was only too pleased to do. What a thrill then to spot an extremely rare beetle - a **large black longhorn**. Not the most stunning of insects, but nevertheless an exciting moment when I checked its identity. We explored two wildlife reserves new to us and spotted three species of **hairstreak butterflies** - **purple**, **brown** and **white letter** along with **purple emperors** and **white admirals**, plus a **holly blue** which feasted on a pile of grassy dog vomit. Fascinating, noisy **horseflies** were sunbathing on cars. *Tabanus sudeticus* is a massive **horsefly** - the UK's largest.

Barry Buddon open day in August - **clegs** are always numerous there and since I accepted that being bitten was inevitable, I decided I would take a shot of one feeding on me. I'd previously been 'stabbed' and I guess I thought that would be pretty much it once the mouthparts were inserted and I wouldn't feel anything, but actually I was beginning to think she had struck a major artery! Quick half dozen photos! Trying to dislodge her was a different matter altogether! Would she let go? I didn't want to kill her, so after gently trying to brush her off unsuccessfully, I finally managed to slide a pond rush under her body and virtually had to lever her out. What a grip. How we laughed!!!

Up to Nairn with the 'van and daily visits to the **dolphins** at Chanonry Point. Incredible displays with dozens leaping clear of the water, close to the shore. A lovely campsite, with numerous **red squirrels**, bountiful and beautiful **fungi** and the most stunning sunsets. Then across to Tarland to join up with Grampian Fungus group for an outing with expert and enthusiastic mycologist Liz Holden as autumn started to take hold, sharing **yellow fan**, *Sarcodon squamosus*, **devil's tooth** with its red droplets and **red-legged jelly babies** - particular to Scotland. This campsite also had numerous **red squirrels**, who really seem to have had a great year all over. Returning home, we visited Morton Lochs to photograph even more **red squirrels** and were intrigued to note the variety of

colours there. A **greater hornail** female (**giant wood wasp**) was flying round and, though it looks fearsome, is actually a massive harmless **sawfly**. Also spotted were **foxes**, **jays**, an **egret** and a **kingfisher**.

Driving near Ethie Woods, we spotted a **grey squirrel**, dead on the road. We had previously thought we'd had a glimpse of one in the woodland, while dog walking and this confirmed their presence - duly reported to the Red Squirrel Survey. National Moth Night at St. Cyrus was a bit of a let down, with more **toads** seen than moths! As autumn progressed we took a walk up to Hill of Rowan, hoping to photograph **red grouse**, but were also surprised and pleased to see a flock of 14 or so **red kites**, what a spectacle. Likewise the news that six **short eared owls** had taken up residence at Elliot after being rescued from oil rigs, had us swiftly there with our cameras. How wonderful to see them quartering the territory and swooping into the grass after their prey. We walked the dogs at Balgavies Loch and a skein of **greylags** flew over, just above our heads. They made the most amazing sound as they whiffled down, like the sound of zips being undone! As is our habit, we went to Montrose Basin for sunset and sunrise shots of the **pink foot geese**, with a particularly fine morning where they all took off en masse, an incredible sight and sound, which next season I will try to video.

As we moved into winter, the weather remained particularly mild and at Elliot, dozens of final instar **fox moth caterpillars** were still active. Jim spotted a single **brent goose** at Victoria Park, in the company of **oystercatchers**. An outing to Mugdock Country Park, Glasgow, on a crisp day produced some cracking examples of **hair ice**, which apparently needs a wood rotting fungus before special conditions can be met for it to appear. Returning from Balgavies, we were brought to a halt by a **cormorant** in the middle of the road. Having just had an extremely heavy rainfall, it looked like this one had mistaken the road for the river. Thankfully, it was able to get airborne when I advanced towards it, to guide it to safety.

On a final note, I'm sure you will all be delighted to hear that we have another **great spotted woodpecker** visiting our garden again. This one seems to stand up against the hordes of **starlings** visiting and is more confident generally, spending as long as 12 minutes at a time in the garden. Such a joy to watch and a great way to end 2015.

2016 promises much in the way of opportunities since Jim and myself are now both happily retired. So much to look forward to in the year ahead. Until next time then.....

Stevie Smith



Short-eared owl at Elliot Photograph Stevie Smith