

Dundee Naturalists' Society

Instituted 1874



Bulletin No 49 2024

**DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY
ANNUAL BULLETIN No 49
2024**

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| Hon President: | Professor Jeremy Greenwood |
| Hon Vice Presidents: | Mr Richard Brinklow Mr Brian Allan Miss Dorothy Fyffe |
| President: | Mr Colin McLeod |
| Vice Presidents: | Mrs Cathy Caudwell Vacant |
| Hon Secretary, Membership Secretary: | Mrs Lorna Ward, 30 Portree Avenue, Broughty Ferry, Dundee. DD5 3EQ (01382 779939) |
| Treasurer: | Vacant |
| Committee members | Marian Antram ('22), David Lampard ('22), Liz Olejnik ('23), Eleanor Stamp ('24) |
| Bulletin Editor: | Mrs Anne Reid, 2 East Navarre Street, Monifieth, Dundee. DD5 4QS (01382 532486) email: acmc.reid@virgin.net |

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The Bulletin cover illustration is by Shelagh Gardiner and shows the Society's emblem, the dwarf cornel. Other illustrations are by Anne Reid, Jim Cook 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. Thanks to Colin Reid and Mary Watson for proof reading and helpful comments. Thanks also to those who have willingly, and promptly, supplied photos at my request.

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.dundeenaturalists.org.uk . Facebook page: Dundee Naturalists' Society

Anne Reid

SOCIETY REPORTS PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Our 150th anniversary meant 2024 was a particularly busy year, with, in addition to our usual programme of lectures and outings, a series of five special workshops focusing on different topics held at Dundee University Botanic Garden between March and July, the opening of our exhibition at the McManus in September, and the launch of the history book at the start of December. Our activities had frequent coverage in the *Courier*, and we even featured on BBC Radio Scotland's *Out of Doors* programme in December. Extra fundraising initiatives crept into some of our indoor meetings - the sale of donated second-hand natural history books, and even a raffle at our Christmas meeting.

We also had a display table at Guardswell Farm Produce Market near Kinnaird three times in the summer. The Society used to be a regular attendee at the long-running Dundee Flower and Food Festival in Camperdown Park, but now that has been discontinued, we need to look for new ways and places to reach out to the wider public. Participating in community events and joint surveys like bioblitzes help to raise our profile, as does extending the audience for particular lectures, such as the one in October on slugs, which brought in members of horticultural bodies as well as Nats.

All these activities were quite a lot of work for a small core of the most active members, and your Council had to hold more meetings than in a typical year. However, the efforts have paid off: we engaged with people who hadn't encountered the Nats before, we've seen new faces at some of our meetings and, for the first time in some years, the number of new members joining has exceeded the inevitable losses. Hopefully this is the start of a turnaround in our fortunes, but we still need your help in attracting more members. There are ample supplies of our colour leaflet, so please carry a few to give to anyone who might share our interests. It's much easier to tell people briefly about what we do, and to give them a leaflet to take away to read at their leisure, than to overwhelm them with verbal information and hope that they'll remember to follow it up later. If you know somewhere that could display a larger bundle, please ask! If the leaflets run out, that will be a good problem to have, and we'd be very glad to print more.

While it's pleasing to report a growth in membership, it would still be welcome if more would come on the bus trips. As reported last year, these run at a loss to the Society, and we won't be able to continue subsidising them indefinitely. A few extra passengers on each would be enough to restore us to breakeven for bus hire costs.

For the first time, we now have a complete-as-possible list of all our past excursions from 1874 to 2024, prepared as one of the online appendices for the history book. Even if you don't count our residential trips (which covered the country from Shetland to Yorkshire), our day excursions have ranged far and wide, from the Clyde Valley to the north-east of Aberdeenshire and the far west of Perthshire. Bus trips enabled Society members to not only explore places farther afield, but also to undertake some linear walks that could not easily be done using their own transport. The number of bus trips has already been greatly reduced from a few years ago, and it would be a shame if we lose an aspect of the Society's activities that has continued for 100 years.

Suggestions for places to visit in future are always welcome - you don't need to be a member of Council to contribute ideas, or even to volunteer to help lead an excursion.

Colin McLeod

RECORDING CONVENOR'S REPORT

As this was our 150th year we made a big effort to try and reach a large audience that is new to looking at the natural world. To achieve this we organised events at the University of Dundee Botanic Garden and at Guardswell Farm market. At the Botanic Garden, we set up a display table on the way in, so that visitors both to the Garden and the Café passed us. We held one event a month, starting with an indoor **owl pellet** analysis workshop in March. The pellets that we looked at came from one **barn owl** nest box on the estate at Bamff, collected on our recce visit there. Using some literature from the Mammal Society we worked through some interesting small mammals, guided by Jeremy Greenwood.

The plan for the April event was to walk around the garden and look at examples of **lichens** growing in the garden. The day was excellent and our guide was member Margaret Chapman who had prepared a trail and accompanying leaflet.

The theory was that by May we would have some warm weather, which we did. However, it had also been very dry, so trying to find **soil invertebrates** was rather a challenge. The ground was baked hard and most insects had found deep and cool damp places to hide in! With perseverance we succeeded. The most impressive organisms that we collected were the *Staphylinidae* larvae, and I was impressed how many of our younger visitors could name them as **devil's coach horse**. We had very much caught the attention of our young visitors! This was the day that coincided with the garden taking part in 'Plant Power Day'. The staff in the garden counted a minimum of 770 visitors on the day, and it seemed that most came to our two tables! We just never stopped, so I had no idea what was happening in the rest of the garden. It was just non-stop talking to people about soil invertebrates.



The June event was a little more relaxed, this was the **pond dipping** day, and we had help from Rachel Mackay-Austin from Riverwood Ecology, and Alan Prescott and Christine Schilde from Dundee University. Again we achieved our aim to introduce people to a different view of the natural world. The day was well attended in part no doubt due to the appearance of our own Anne Reid on the radio programme, "Scotland Outdoors", the previous day.

If one of our garden events was a bit of a disappointment it was the last one, our **butterfly** day. Because of the weather we hardly saw a single butterfly, not a good start! The second problem was that the garden was virtually devoid of visitors! I have never seen both the garden and the Café so empty so, did we hit a holiday, a major sports event or what?

Overall, the events were a success, and also at each event David Lampard ran moth traps. This provided even more interest for our visitors to look at (especially on the butterfly day). A lot of people, both Nats and others helped, so thank you all.

Our other "looking at the natural world events" at Guardswell Farm markets, were smaller affairs. We had a table just inside the entrance hall, which we decorated with the Nats' popup display, as well as a container with the previous night's moth catch, always good for attracting passing visitors. Just as at our Botany event we had some very interesting discussions. One of these produced a record for a moth that was new to the vice-county of East Perthshire. Because we had attracted the attention of a young family, their mother started talking about a moth her husband had recently photographed on the wall of their house. This turned out to be the first record of a **narrow-bordered bee hawkmoth**! Although our objective was not a recruiting drive, we did not reject people, and we did in fact attract some new members.

One Saturday bus trip was particularly interesting, this was to the Sands of Forvie in early June, where it was very nice to see all four species of **terns, sandwich, little, common** and **arctic**, on the same outing. The largest specimen seen up close by all of us was an, unfortunately long dead, whale, probably a **minke**.

Our Saturday trip to Bamff estate produced some interesting evidence of the presence of **beaver** with lots of wood chip and neatly cut branches, but unfortunately we failed to actually get a view. But the estate did provide a supply of **barn owl** pellets for our workshop!

The Nats have been out recording, just a look at the pages of the Newsletter and Facebook and you will see the evidence. Some have been out bird watching or plant hunting, others working in gardens, woodlands and reed-beds finding moths; a glance in the Newsletters will show you some of the fascinating results.

In last year's report I commented on the spread of the **speckled wood butterfly**, this year has seen more evidence of it. This has been complicated by the poor butterfly weather. The sightings of the early species like the **orange tip** were fine, but later species did not fare so well. This made it hard to spot the **holly blue butterfly** which had been working its way through north Fife in recent years and was seen on the north side of the Tay in several places over summer '23. The big question is how did it do this year? As the **holly blue** is on the wing and lays its eggs on **holly** in May and on **ivy** in August, it coincided with less than ideal butterfly weather this year, however there were still several sightings by Nats in the Monifieth area. Not only that, but the **white letter hairstreak** has been photographed in Dundee for the first time this year, so movement of species north is continuing. Let's just hope summer '25 will bring larger numbers of butterflies!

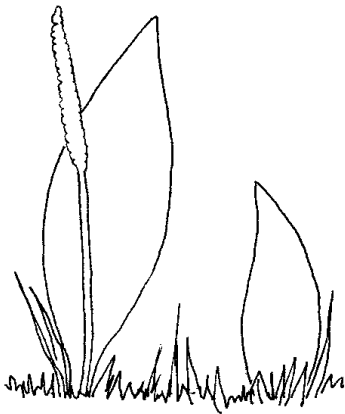
Barry Caudwell

CARSEGOWNIEMUIR QUARRY REPORT

It is no surprise that this report marks what has been a very strange weather year. The year began with the longest, wettest spell of weather ever, with the lower ground flooded continuously between early October the previous year and early April, a period of nearly six months. Although the spells of heavy rain decreased enough to allow the water to recede to more normal levels in the ponds, the continuing damp weather in the spring and early summer kept the soil moist enough to allow further large-scale tree planting and more than 30 saplings of **birch** and **willow** were planted during the spring on the bank on the north side of the low ground between ponds 4 and 5.

The long period of flooding in the low ground has had long-lasting effects that we've never seen before. One of them has been that the five **orchid** spikes which have appeared naturally in recent years along on both sides of the main path between the small steps and pond 2 didn't appear and grow at all (despite several careful searches in the grass), let alone produce any flower spikes. We can only hope that if there's no more serious and long-lasting flooding this winter then they may reappear and grow next year. Fingers crossed!

Other plants individually affected include the **raspberries** growing on the low ground between the main steps and pond 1. They all seem to have died; the dead canes have remained there with no signs of growth this past summer. Another was the **garlic mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) growing in the area under the large planted **willows** opposite pond 1. The plants were very late in appearing, perhaps more because of the slow warming of the soil this past spring after the flood eventually drained away rather than the flooding itself, and grew large and healthy-looking leaves but never flowered and produced seed. It is normally an annual plant but we hope, that if they survive the winter, the plants will flower and produce seeds in the summer to come. A general effect of the lengthy flood has been to suppress the growth of all the grasses along the main path on the low ground, particularly around pond 2 and the barbecue site. Certainly, it made the task of strimming the grass in that area so very much easier.



In contrast, the **adders-tongue ferns** (left) have grown well with good numbers of leaves appearing in the usual site in the damp ground near the eastern end of pond 3. Ronnie Ogg spotted another good clump of 22 leaves and fertile fronds close to the barbecue site but they all disappeared suddenly from one week to the next. Perhaps **deer** visited the succulent leaves one night and grazed the lot? Later we found a further clump of 12 leaves and fertile fronds well clear of the barbecue site and much closer to pond 2, an entirely new location for these plants. This time we protected the leaves by moving the spawning raft along and placing it over them. The plants survived the summer and only gradually died back as the autumn came on.

A further effect of the unusual weather this year, although nothing to do with the flooding, has been the almost total absence of **oak leaf galls**, particularly the usually common to abundant **spangle** and **silk-button galls** underneath the leaves. Perhaps the cold and wet weather back in early spring killed or washed off the tiny wasps before they had a chance to lay their eggs in the undersides of the leaves. The **crab apples** in enclosure 3 also didn't do well, producing only a few fruits. (And yet the **apples** beside the cottage flowered and fruited prolifically.) On the other hand, the **rowans** and **hawthorns** formed lots of flowers and abundant fruit in the autumn. The **blackbirds** and numbers of other immigrant birds greatly enjoyed them, although the often numerous **redwing** and **fieldfare** winter visitors notably have been very sparse. Is this an effect of smaller numbers of these birds flying in from Iceland or is it an effect of climate change altering their migration time down to Britain so that the birds miss most of the abundant red berries in our quarry?

The **blanket-weed** on pond 5 was much less dominant in 2024 but still needed to be controlled and Ronnie Ogg set to with his usual gusto and the grapnel and fork. He lifted the green fibrous masses onto the bank just above the edge of the water, to allow as many as possible of the small water creatures the chance to escape back into the water. Once again the grass growths along the paths were very dense and heavy this year, with the damp soils and warm weather, and took considerable efforts to clear with our strimmer in July and early August, in good time for the barbecue. However, a sheared coupling meant that the strimmer was away for repair for three weeks in the middle of the path-cutting season. The result was that, although all the major paths and other important areas were cleared in time for the summer barbecue, not all the paths were strimmed this past year. The Society barbecue

in the evening of 17th August was highly successful. (See report on page 22.) Fortunately, the weather held long enough for a lovely day and very pleasant evening.

The tree planting day Saturday 19th October again involved a barbecue, but this year in very much better weather! It wasn't too warm at times but at least remained dry. (See report on page 27.) In the weeks afterwards Ronnie and Jim checked on the netting and protective mulch matting around the new trees and continued planting several more, to give a total of 22 small trees planted in the autumn season and a grand total of 54 for the year. The pair also completed the three larger path improvement tasks, filling in a hollow and grading slopes along a short stretch of the main path, another similar effort on side-path 3b2 and, most significantly, on back-path 1 where the deteriorating back steps were replaced with a graded slope and the wet and slippery hollow filled in and raised by about 30 cm. All these stretches should be easier and much safer to walk over as well as being more convenient to strim.

The total list of species ever recorded from inside the quarry boundary (which doesn't include birds just flying over nor species living and growing only outside the boundary fence) continues to increase. The target last year, you may recall, was to top 1,000 species, which we achieved comfortably, with much help from the insect recorders. The target this year was 1,100 and we have exceeded this one as well, again with the efforts of the insect and spider specialists and, this year, with the help of a specialist in freshwater life, Rachel Mackay-Austin, for all which we are very grateful. Rachel found a fascinating new record in pond 4, a rare **corixid bug**, new not just to the quarry nor the Angus area but to Scotland. It is the back-swimmer, *Corixa panzeri*. The grand total at the time of writing stands at 1,131 species – and counting, as more new records come in.

Jim Cook

OBITUARIES

DOROTHY POUNDER

We mark the death, in August, of Dorothy Pounder with sadness, though not many people now in the Society will remember her well. Although she never took part in the Council work, she was well known through her husband, the late Bede Pounder, who had been a very active and influential Vice-President and President of the Society in the late 1990s. She frequently attended our winter lectures with Bede and often came along on our outings in former times, as well as being an enthusiast for the Society's weekend excursions. She leaves a daughter and a son and several grandchildren. We join in sympathising with them for their loss.

Jim Cook

MARGARET MCLAREN 1936-2024

Margaret died suddenly in the nursing home in Kirriemuir where she had moved earlier this year and we sadly lost a lady who had been a most important member of the Society. After leaving school in Aberdeen, she trained as a secretary, learning accurate and fast typing, document handling and shorthand, all skills she put to good use when she became Nats' Secretary. Margaret and her husband Ron moved down to Newtyle where she ran a small shop while Ron served his time doing his National Service in the RAF. After release from the Service, Ron trained as a teacher of Technical Subjects. Margaret helped to support the family by continuing to run the corner shop in Newtyle while he went through the training years in Dundee. Meanwhile she became a pillar of the local community, being a keen tennis player and helping to run the club, taking up dancing, playing the piano and many other activities as well as bringing up two children, Morag and Neil.

Ron took up a post in the new Carnoustie High School and the family moved to Barnhill where he was much nearer his job. Margaret worked in a number of secretarial jobs over the years. Her bright and quick personality helped her in this work. Unfortunately, Ron died rather suddenly and left her broken-hearted. She gradually recovered and began life afresh. It was about this time in the mid-1990s

that a friend from her dancing group suggested that she might continue her long interest in the natural world by joining the Dundee Naturalists' Society.

It was only a couple of years after joining that she was invited to join the Nats' Council. The rest, as they say, is history. It wasn't long before she took on the testing job of Secretary for our Society. She became well known among members for often wearing a most distinctive dark tartan, wide-brimmed, soft felt hat on outings. Her training and long experience, as well as her cheerful, friendly and helpful personality, aided greatly in the voluntary job. She was able to take down verbatim in shorthand the minutes of numerous meetings, quickly type up and distribute the results and gradually assume a central role in helping to run the Society. She led or co-led a number of our outings as well as organising several weekends. Indeed, people often used to phone her up to confirm activities and bookings and generally find out what was going on.

Bede Pounder once told me that he and Margaret organised a Nats outing to the Winter Gardens in Aberdeen. They had been there originally the previous year to walk around and make first contact. Then, on a second visit to confirm arrangements shortly before the outing, the secretary there was rather vague about the arrangements. Margaret, who'd been wearing a different hat, suddenly said "Wait a minutie" and reached into her bag to pull out her characteristic broad-brimmed felt hat and put it on. The secretary immediately said "Oh yes, I remember" and confirmed the arrangements!

The Society had bought its first computer in the mid-1990s, and when Margaret became Secretary this, and its attendant printer, were passed on to her. Margaret set-to to learn how to use it and soon was able to produce all her notes, minutes and Society records in the memory and on the printer, generally making her numerous tasks so much easier and quicker (though Anne, who lived just along the road, was sometimes called on for computing help).

Eventually, when she retired from her many years of service as Secretary, the Council organised a presentation from members of a lovely porcelain ornament of small birds and flowers. It occupied pride of place in her display cabinet. Even after retirement as Secretary, Margaret still continued with a number of Nats' activities, both at evening meetings and on outings. In particular, she formed part of the small team, along with Dorothy Fyffe who'd originally suggested the idea, to select a suitably sturdy garden shed which, when modified, became our hide in Carsegowniemuir Quarry in 2012.

Margaret eventually left her much-loved family home and garden in Barnhill when it started to become too much for her to cope with. She moved a number of years ago to sheltered housing in Forfar to be near her daughter and, only this past spring, transferred from there into the nursing home in Kirriemuir. It was a well-attended but rather sad gathering at the reception in Forfar after the funeral. Her son Neil had flown in from his home in Australia, and her three grandsons and the great grandchildren on Morag's side were all there. Our sympathy and best wishes go to them as we greatly feel the loss after her 30 years in the Society.

Jim Cook

BILL MACFARLANE SMITH

Dr Bill Macfarlane Smith died in December aged 82. Well known in plant breeding circles, he had worked latterly at the James Hutton Institute at Invergowrie, where he retained links after retirement. Amongst his wider interests and responsibilities were the Dundee Rotary Club, Dundee High School board and President of the Dundee Choral Union.

Though his wife Daphne is a regular attender at Nats events, Bill only came along occasionally. He was more often to be seen at bird club meetings, but was always cheerful and friendly to everyone and will be sorely missed. We extend our sympathies to Daphne and family.

Anne Reid

LYDIA DORWARD

Lydia, widow of Morrison, died in July, aged 95. She and Morrison were regular attenders of outings and Nats weekends.

WINTER MEETINGS CAMPERDOWN PARK BARBECUE

3rd January

The rain teemed down as I drove to Camperdown and I wondered whether anyone would turn up. A very pleasant surprise when a full 15 people appeared, so the barbecue was set up in the shelter of the redundant golf starter's box (right). Everyone else went for a walk - umbrellas, full waterproofs and wellies were recommended (and mostly worn!) while Anne started the barbecue, which took well after a smoky start. The Rangers did appear to find out where the smoke was coming from, but were reassured to find it was a barbecue and not the starters' box itself. (I had told them we would be there, but long enough ago that they had forgotten.)



Interestingly, at the early, smoky stage, Barry and Anne noticed a **spider** abseiling down its silk from the rafters above. Over the next half hour more spiders appeared at intervals (which were mostly rescued), presumably displaced by either the smoke or the heat from the barbecue.

On the walk the highlights were a **treecreeper** and **goldcrest**, reported by Cathy and a **jay** and a **buzzard** seen by Colin McLeod. Anne had set everyone to look for plants in flower, but the only thing found after a lot of hunting was a **greater periwinkle**, near the house. Ronnie found a **rhododendron** in flower after everyone else had left (down near the Zoo), which was added to the list for the BSBI New Year plant hunt. Everyone had been warned to be back sharp, while the coals were still hot, and everything was cooked in good order - it all tasted good on such a wet morning. There was, slightly surprisingly, a tree decorated with red baubles near our BBQ site - very festive-looking.

After we had cleared up the rain went off so Anne went for a walk and saw four **roe deer** not far from the car park, a **sparrowhawk** chasing a **crow** and a twittering flock of **lesser redpolls** at the top of a **larch** tree.

Stevie and Jim (Cook) managed to locate, between them, the grand total of 19 species of fungi in the park. Most of them were rather unimpressive crusts, a few brackets and several jellies, but there were two cap fungi - **buttercap**, *Collybia butyracea*, and **velvet shank** or **winter fungus**, *Flammulina velutipes*.

Anne Reid

JAMES DURHAM - DUNDEE'S FORGOTTEN 19TH CENTURY GEOLOGIST (1840-1905)

Prof Rob Duck - 9th January

Colin McLeod introduced the speaker, Professor Rob Duck, who presented the inaugural lecture in our series of 150th Anniversary events. A long-time lecturer in Geology and Environmental Science at the University here in Dundee, we were privileged to hear a really excellently researched and consequently fascinating presentation.

Rob became interested in the name James Durham (JD) after discovering that a university bursary and bequest bore his name. This bequest had been to fund geological research. Owing to the terms of the bequest, it did not actually reach the university until some considerable time after the death, not only of himself but also of his sisters, and of a life rentrix of them. Further interest was sparked in Rob by a chance discovery and purchase of a paper by James Durham, in Spitalfield Market in London. During the Covid lockdown of 2020-21 Rob had the need for a project close to home, and the further investigation of James Durham's stamping ground near Wormit seemed ideal.

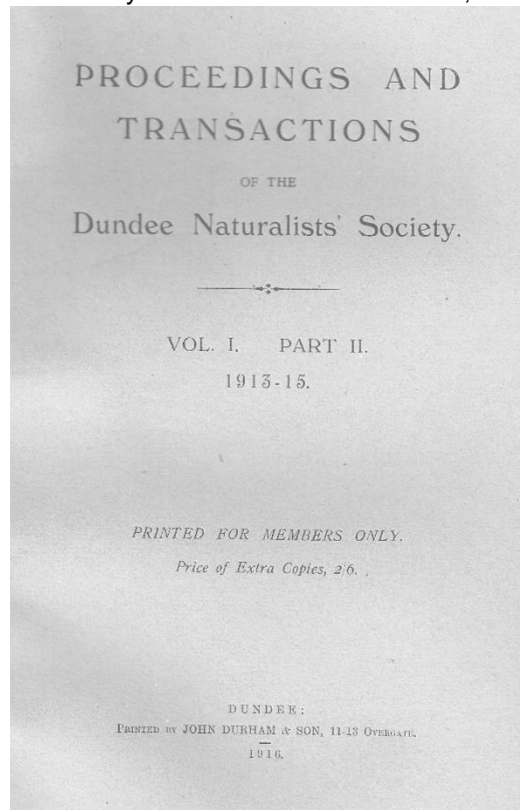
James's father, John Durham, was an artist who started a printer's business at 49 High Street, where all sorts of theatrical programmes, stationery and publications were produced. In fact, very appropriately, the Dundee Nats' had their 1895 "Coming of Age Address" printed there. The Durham family house which was well positioned for investigating the geology alongside new railway cuttings, still exists in Newport, on the corner of William Street. In 1873 James became a partner in his father's printing business, at which time their name became John Durham & Son.

James was inspired to attend lectures on Geology and found his Fife home a major inspiration for his geological interests; the cutting of the railway line there gave access to new rock exposures. Some of his collection of rock specimens, including a rare obsidian type of rhyolite, were subsequently bequeathed to the University.

JD was much involved with the history of the Nats. He was President from 1886-90 as well as being President of the East of Scotland Union of Naturalists' Societies. He spoke to the Nats on 25 occasions, his first talk in 1874 being on the subject of "The Geology of the bed of the Tay". He is grandly and somewhat erroneously listed as "Fellow of the DNS" in his application for membership of the Scottish Geological Society.

Though the proposed Dundee British Association meeting for 1939 didn't actually happen owing to the outbreak of war, there were some positive outcomes, including the production of a geological map of the local area, partly based on JD's work. JD had already benefited from the earlier 1867 meeting of the BA in Dundee. His many papers were on diverse geological subjects including fluvio-glacial deposits (kettle holes, eskers and kames), the middens discovered during the excavation of Dundee Docks, well-borings in Dundee and the quantity of sediment carried by the Tay. Whilst not all his conclusions were correct, they represented a great advance in the understanding of our area.

His cousin and brother-in-law, William Durham, also a scientist, proved a useful contact and was one of those who proposed him as a FRSE, other referees being key members of the scientific community at that time - James Geikie, Alexander Crum-Brown and Peter Guthrie Tait.



The Durham family grave can still be seen in the Western Cemetery in Dundee. The gravestone bears the names of James's parents, John Durham and Margaret Rough, James himself and some of his siblings.

The Nats visited one of JD's favourite sites, Ghoul's Den between Kilmany and Wormit, in May 1935. You can still visit it today although it has become a bit overgrown.

Our Hon President, Prof Jeremy Greenwood, gave the vote of thanks. He pointed out the remarkable achievements that were made by Durham, who, without formal science training, was able, by personal effort, networking and opportunity to add to the scientific knowledge of our area. Maybe there is a lesson there for all of us!

Colin McLeod, displayed surplus copies of the "Proceedings and Transactions of the Dundee Naturalists' Society" for 1913-15 Vol. I Part II - which was printed by none other than John Durham & Son, 11-13 Overgate, Dundee. A number of these copies were avidly snapped up by members for a cash donation to funds.

Cathy Caudwell

MEMBERS' NIGHT

23rd January

Everyone was very cooperative and had submitted their slides to Anne in advance so that a single Powerpoint presentation could be run to streamline the evening, with no gaps for changeovers. Most gave a summary of their 2023 activities.

Alban Houghton showed a selection of waders at Monifieth, the Kinnordy **beaver** lodge (right, AH) and damaged trees, **adders** at Glen Esk and a **common lizard** at Balgavies. The **slender 5-spot burnet moth** at Tailend Moss and a comparative **6-spot burnet** were followed by **red admirals** and **peacocks** on **buddleia**. The newly arrived **holly blue butterfly** has reached Broughty Ferry, so we should look out for it in 2024.

Brian Ballinger showed summaries of some of his studies on comparative Urban and Rural floras, in such habitats as walls, cemeteries, car parks and industrial estates.

Brian Allan had been to the Greek Peloponnese in November and showed several flowering **crocus** species, *Cyclamen graecum* and *Sternbergia lutea*. A well-camouflaged **praying mantis** and a hardy Belgian swimming in a pool added to the variety.

Margaret Bainbridge showed **holly** and **ivy** in her garden and hailed their merits.

Anne Reid showed images from Nats outings in 2023 including Banchory, Dumbarrie Links and the **hound's tongue** growing there, and the **broad-leaved helleborine** at Petershill Quarry. The barbecue at Carsegowniemuir in the summer was contrasted with floods and floating tables there on the tree planting day in October.

Cathy Caudwell described some of her moth and butterfly studies, including moth trapping in the Tay reedbeds and **northern brown argus** surveys at Lundie Crags and elsewhere. She also showed the **death's head hawkmoth** found in St Andrews.

Jeremy Greenwood had a small selection of woodcut prints from 'the Farmer's Year' by Clare Leighton which showed just how much things have changed in the countryside since it was published in 1933.

Mathieu Soetens had brought his own presentation on his birding trip to Hong Kong and the Philippines, and showed such enthusiasm that we were late finishing and had to hurry everyone out of the room before locking up time!



Anne Reid

THE FLORA OF JERSEY

Lyn Jones - 13th February
Joint with BSS

Lyn Jones, Emeritus Professor at Dundee University, gave a talk to this joint meeting on the flora of the island of Jersey. He and his wife have a house on the island and have visited on many occasions over the years.

Like the other Channel Islands, Jersey lies off the coast of France. It has many local customs including the Battle of Flowers, where many of the brightly coloured floats are made up from the **hare's-tail grass** (*Lagurus ovatus*) from southern Europe, which is not really a native species here. The island is well known for the **Jersey Royal potato**, but there is much else of botanical interest there. Description of the island's flora started in 1689 and there have been several lists and floras since then, most recently a checklist in 2012.

Some species reach their northern limit here and Lyn described some of the interesting and important ones. The **Jersey** or **loose-flowered orchid** (*Anacamptis* or *Orchis laxiflora*) is a southern species at its northern limit. Two meadows have been set aside for its preservation, where it usually puts on a colourful display.

Another special species is the **Jersey buttercup** (*Ranunculus paludosus*), also reaching its northern limit and now only to be seen in two monads. The tiny **Jersey forget-me-not** (*Myosotis sicula*)

survives in one pond, where it is threatened by the invasive **New-Zealand pigmyweed** (*Crassula helmsii*), which poses great challenges to the survival of this forget-me-not.

The **Jersey fern** (*Anogamma leptophylla*), also at a northern limit, is in several places and new sites have been found recently. The **Jersey pink** (*Dianthus gallicus*) persists on one sand-dune site, although it is common in France. Other plants of interest include the **Jersey cudweed** (*Laphangium* or *Gnaphalium luteoalbum*), possibly native and now appearing sporadically as a weed. **Purple viper's-bugloss** (*Echium plantagineum*), more characteristic of southern climes, is also to be seen in Jersey.

Lyn is fortunate that his garden lawn in Jersey features the delicate **autumn lady's-tresses orchid** (*Spiranthes spiralis*), flowering profusely most years.

Invasive species prove a problem, as in so many places, and the **hottentot fig** (*Carpobrotus edulis*) from South Africa is growing densely in some coastal sites, smothering native species. It is colourful, but is a problem, together with several other alien (neophyte) species which raise issues. Some natives are also becoming invasive as a result of reductions in intensive farming to the extent that they outcompete rarer natives. Problem natives include **gorse** (*Ulex europaeus*), **bracken** (*Pteridium aquilinum*), **blackthorn** (*Prunus spinosa*) and, especially, **burnet rose** (*Rosa spinosissima*).

Other wildlife on Jersey is also of note, including birds such as **marsh harriers**, **chough**, three species of **egret** and the **glossy ibis**. The **Jersey tiger moth** is also commonly seen.

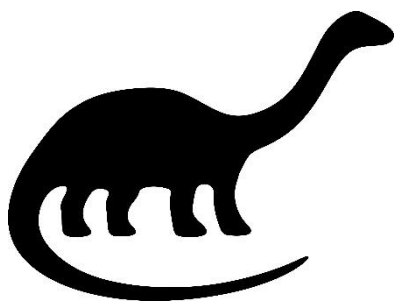
Lyn pointed out that Jersey has good flight connections with Scotland, which are quite inexpensive in winter, and a climate that is 2-4 degrees Celsius warmer than Dundee. Some of us have never been to Jersey and it sounds like a very rewarding place to visit for its wildlife as well as its other attractions.

Brian Ballinger

CONSTRUCTING A DINOSAUR WALLCHART

Jon Hoad - 27th February

The Dundee Nats were treated to an entertaining talk by the artist and musician Jon Hoad. As a member of 'PalAlba' (Palaeontological Scotland), Jon has had extensive experience in attending dig sites for fossils and has created stunning artwork for museums, scientific magazines and universities. He often works alongside Steve Brusatte (who gave a talk to the Nats a few years ago) when on expeditions to the Isle of Skye. Jon's own company is called 'Art of Ancient Life' and he specialises in drawing subjects from the natural and the archaeological worlds. Jon also teaches classes for children and adults on how to draw and colour their own masterpieces. Having spent a decade in Melbourne (Australia), Jon returned to Perth (Scotland) where he has two studios and a collection of artefacts.



Jon started his talk by telling the Nats that one of his big influences was the rock band 'Magma' which changed his life and encouraged him to take up guitar playing. He was accompanied by a guitar, affectionately named 'Crackhead' because of a crack in the back of the instrument. Jon was also inspired by natural history and he showed the Nats a photo of a sauropod (long-necked dinosaur) model he had made as a child.

Although Jon started out in the art world by illustrating archaeology such as ancient axe heads, he is better known for illustrating prehistoric plants and habitats with the occasional dinosaur passing by. He sometimes spends between 12 and 16 hours a day working on a project. He has one studio in a building with other artists and another studio in an office for local archaeologists. Jon is a very hard worker and his studios are full of dinosaur outlines and drawings. He has also created a collection of Iron Age coin illustrations.

During the Covid lockdown of 2020, Jon needed a project to work on and this came in the form of an ambitious wallchart highlighting the evolutionary relationships between all the known groups of dinosaurs (something that got updated as he was working through this project). Jon brought his wallchart to show the Nats and it is an impressive work of art and science. He uses traditional methods of creating art and does not normally use digital means. He is also a critic of AI (Artificial Intelligence) for making illustrations, as AI can endanger the professions of many artists throughout the world but does not have the accuracy of a living human. AI can threaten palaeontology illustrators and Jon had to find a niche in order to escape competition from computers, so he used his 30+ years of experience and his connections in the palaeontological world to help him get by.

The chart is called '*The Dinosauria*' and is not just a family tree of the popular dinosaurs but also shows what times these creatures lived in. Dinosaurs dominated the world for roughly 150 million years so it was a challenge to fit even the basic information in this chart. Jon did have to use an IT program just for this work as the poster was put together digitally from scanings of his hand-drawn and painted work. He used Photo Shop to fit the pictures together. There are about 1,500 separate layers to fit on the chart. Jon was working alongside a dinosaur consultant from the Natural History Museum in London who wanted him to change the position of one dinosaur; a task that took 3 hours to do! Such was Jon's dedication to getting the wallchart as scientifically accurate as possible. As new discoveries were constantly being made, Jon would have to make additional changes before the chart was officially released.

The dinosaurs illustrated are from good evidence, including from near complete fossils. Dinosaurs known from sparse fragments were not drawn on the chart, especially since many dinosaurs (such as *Spinosaurus* and *Deinocheirus*) based on scant remains often turn out to be completely different to what was thought when more fossils are found. Up one side of the wallchart are several illustrations of the dinosaurs in what would have been their natural habitats. Different species are interacting the way they most likely would have done back then; no evenly-matched battles for the sake of entertainment, but animals behaving much as they do now.

Jon likes plants, in fact, Jon is probably more of a palaeobotany illustrator than a dinosaur artist. Many people have said "Those are really nice prehistoric plants, it's a pity you've put a dinosaur in it!" Jon is very keen on adding the right plants to his paintings in order to reveal to us what the habitat would have looked like. Interestingly, a lot of prehistoric plants have similar relatives alive today which helps with getting the look right. Ferns and conifers are often portrayed in these illustrations and there is no shortage of living species to help as life models. Jon showed the Nats a number of samples of fossil plants with fairly close relatives alive today.

Jon uses a variety of techniques to get the right look. He uses ink and pencil dust for some of the plants. Ink is used for the plants in the foreground and pencil dust for giving a fainter look on the plants in the background. This gives the impression of those plants drawn with pencil dust being further away. Jon uses acrylic paints for large paintings as these dry much faster than watercolours. Jon managed to get two creative art grants which allowed him to get a good printer and a good computer. The printer is named 'The Beast' as it is enormous.

Jon showed the Nats a preview of his current project, a similar wallchart to '*The Dinosauria*' but for prehistoric marine reptiles. Rather than being one big group, many of these creatures are from various distantly related groups. These include marine crocodiles, sea turtles, ichthyosaurs, pliosaurs, plesiosaurs and mosasaurs.

As part of his early work Jon illustrated giant extinct penguins for the *New Zealand Geographic* magazine and for the University of Melbourne. More recently, Jon has accompanied the University of Edinburgh to the Isle of Skye with Steve Brusatte. Jon sees things as an artist while most of the students see things as geology students, which means that Jon can spot things that the students sometimes miss. In one well publicised incident, a young student spotted a bone and it was Jon who identified it as that of a large pterosaur. The whole specimen was preserved and once described, this discovery made it to the national news. Jon emphasised to the Nats that a lot of the current discoveries aren't necessarily found in the field but are often made within museum collections waiting for someone to examine them, often many years later. Jon also spotted a 'tridactyl' which is a three-toed theropod (a group that includes the famous bird-like predatory dinosaurs) footprint and as soon as he found one, the team realised that they were surrounded by footprints! Many belonged to other types of dinosaurs. The fossils sites on the Isle of Skye are only along the coastline. Jon casts the footprints and has a collection of footprints that he has found. The largest footprint from the Isle of Skye is perhaps a *Cetiosaurus* footprint which even has the impression of a large claw at the front. *Cetiosaurus* was a long-necked dinosaur that weighed over ten tonnes.



At the finale of the talk, Jon played a great guitar tune which earned a good applause! For those who are interested in seeing more of Jon's art, his company website is: www.artofancientlife.com and his guitar tunes can be listened to on @openstrung1975 on Youtube.

Mike Sedakat

Illustrations from silhouettegarden.com

BAMFF WILDLAND

Paul and Louise Ramsay - 12th March

Paul and Louise Ramsay were invited to speak in our anniversary year on the wilding of their estate. This was especially welcome as it seemed a long time since an earlier Nats visit, when members watched their introduced **beavers**. Paul did the talk, with occasional additions from Louise.

A definition of the term re-wilding was discussed in the first part of the talk. For instance, re-wilding implies a return to a former wild state, but Paul wondered to what state, and to which period of history should the re-wilding take us back to? To the post-glacial? Or should we alternatively view it as restoration ecology, which term could also be used. To a farmer, to abandon one's land implies some idleness on the part of that landowner and for that reason is difficult to come to terms with. Some reference was made to the views of North American authors including John Muir as well as R H MacArthur and E O Wilson, who advocated "Cores, Corridors and Carnivores".¹ Another inspiration was George Monbiot and his recent book "Feral". Paul is working on modifying these ideas for use on a smaller scale.

At Bamff they are lucky to have a 1790s estate map to refer to, of changes proposed at that time, by the famous map-maker Thomas White. Some of those changes such as drainage to improve farmland are now seen in a different light and are being reversed. We then heard about the recent interventions that the Ramsays have pursued at Bamff. These started in the 1980s and 90s with creating farm woodland and were continued by establishing wetlands and organic practices. The charismatic **beavers** were introduced as early as 2002. The estate has more recently been building up an eco-tourism business including the provision of cottages, cabins and shepherd huts which can be rented out to visitors, and a programme of guided walks. The CATERAN Trail passes through the estate and in this way it is accessible to walkers. Visits from researchers and students, particularly from Stirling University, have been encouraged. When George Monbiot visited Bamff in 2014, after seeing the progress, he asked "what are you going to do with the rest of your land?" Since then **sheep** have been removed from the hill land, 100 acres of native woodland were planted over two years, and 450 acres have been fenced by crowd-funding. The existing farm was retained and managed on organic principles. Paul noted that it is unfortunate that the **auroch** is extinct and sadly cannot be their mega-herbivore for grazing the open ground. However, they were able to acquire a herd of eleven **Exmoor ponies** from Glasgow Vet College and additionally three **Tamworth pigs** and some **Luining cattle**. As ponies and cattle graze in different ways and also have different dung fungi, their effects on the ground are diverse. The flora of the estate was "catalysed" by the establishment of strategic "seed islands". The Woodland Trust were helpful with this and the hedgerows were also enhanced.



Regarding **beavers**, these "ecosystem engineers" as they are often described, are thought to have been extirpated from Scotland by 1600.² By re-creating wetlands it is known that an increase in biodiversity can be achieved. Now there are many beaver dams across the estate which slow the flow of the burn and allow **frogs**, **herons** and other wetland species to colonise. We were treated to a great video of the **beavers** carrying mud to plaster their dam underwater and make it more watertight. Watercourses became more complex and areas developed where the sediment was deposited. Beavers coppice the trees and are particularly active in the autumn. Then during

the winter they can strip the bark off the trees. In spring new shoots develop rapidly from the coppice. The dead and decaying wood that results from the beaver activity contributes once again to biodiversity and allows riparian woodland to re-generate. The beavers fell coniferous as well as their favourite food of deciduous trees, apparently to make the area more open.

Help has been provided in monitoring the changes by a number of individuals and organisations. The SWT Conservation Volunteers have had work parties to remove the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum*, and scrapes have been produced for waders. Monitoring has been through University projects and "citizen science". A PhD on changes in the moth fauna has been undertaken by Patrick Cook of Stirling University.

This fascinating insight and presentation was concluded with a video called "Bamff Wildland". We were also told that Bamff estate belongs to a network of re-wilding sites in this part of the world known as the Northwoods Re-wilding Network whose members aim to pursue best practice and connectivity of the landscape. Further information about Northwoods Re-wilding Network can be found at: <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/local-network/northwoods-rewilding-network>

The number of questions which followed indicated the degree of interest that this talk and the wilding of Bamff has generated.

Cathy and Barry Caudwell

¹ This idea was first published about North America in the 1960's. Protecting 'core' areas of wild land, linked together by 'corridors' allowed passage for 'carnivores' to move around the landscape and perform their functional role.

² D.W. Yalden, *The History of British Mammals*.

Note: There was a follow-up visit to Bamff Estate in summer 2024, see page 22. Ed.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2023 NATURAL HISTORY OF MEADOWS AND GRASSLANDS

The results of the 2023 photographic competition were announced after the AGM on 26th March. The entries are shown below, in order of receipt.

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Northern Brown Argus | Alban Houghton |
| Quarry Orchid | Jim Cook |
| Trainee Meadow Manager (young beaver) | Dave Trudgill |
| Oi! Does this count as Grassland? (beefly on blade of grass) | Mike Sedakat |
| Partridge Mix Field Margin | Marian Antram |
| Outstanding in its Field (ink cap in grass) | Colin Reid |
| King of all he Surveys (red deer stag) | Lyn Jones |
| Eyebright | Anne Reid |
| Harebell | Eleanor Stamp |
| Pre-desecration (sycamore, Hadrian's Wall) | Stewart Dodd |
| Brown Hare, Kinnaber | Jon Cook |
| Hot spot for Dragonflies, grassy area, Lundie Woods | Joy Cammack |

Entries were judged by Lorna Ward and Colin McLeod. The winner was Alban Houghton with his Northern Brown Argus butterfly. Second was Jon Cook's Brown Hare at Kinnaber, and third was Partridge Mix Field Margin by Marian Antram. The Kim Eberst Memorial Quaich was presented to Alban Houghton, with certificates for all placed photos.

Anne Reid

The winning photo is in the colour section on page 20.

SUMMER OUTINGS GLASGOW BOTANIC GARDENS AND HAMILTONHILL NATURE RESERVE 20th April

This was the first bus outing of the year to two sites not far from each other. It was a sunny but cool day and the journey was uneventful, although Glasgow's West End is now very busy and was full of shoppers. There is no nearby bus parking to the gardens so we were dropped off at the adjacent bus stop.

Glasgow Botanic Gardens is over 200 years old and moved to its current location in 1842. Originally belonging to the Royal Botanic Institution of Glasgow, it was taken over by Glasgow City Council in 1891.

The Naturalists have been to the gardens many times before and many members went their own way to find their favourite places. April is still early in the year and there were few plants in flower outside. Many spent time in the famous Kibble Palace glass house (right), which contains temperate plants from around the world. In the central part of the dome are a large number of **tree ferns** from the southern hemisphere. The glasshouses have sections with carnivorous plants and orchids, as well as medicinal and “useful” plants and it is easy to lose an hour or so here.



Outside areas include the world rose garden and a growing arboretum. Though too early for floral displays, there was plenty of bird life, especially near the feeders at the far end. Here we saw **greenfinches, house sparrows, robins** and a **dunnock**, with **coal tit** in the trees nearby. A butterfly, possibly a **peacock**, flew past at speed and **buff-tailed** and **common carder bees** were noticed.

There are self-led garden history and tree trails. The café is housed in the original curator's house. The gardens also sit amongst a network of paths and trails including access to the Kelvin walkway. It was peaceful down by the river and two **goosanders** were seen here.

We then moved on to Hamiltonhills Claypit Reserve which, though not far away, seemed to involve a very circuitous route to get there. The reserve was originally a quarry from which the clay lining of the Forth and Clyde Canal was dug, and is on a hill with a good path network. At the highest point there is a great view of the Glasgow city centre skyline. The claypits were left after the clay digging stopped and the site has now also been landscaped, with wooded walks and paths running alongside the canal, between the Firhill and Applecross basins.

As we got off the bus we met a group of reserve volunteers, who mentioned that they had seen **roe deer, herons** and a range of small birds. Everyone scattered to enjoy the spring sunshine. The warm weather also encouraged a range of **bumblebees** (four species) to emerge and **small tortoiseshell** and **peacock** butterflies were basking along the paths. Several **orange tip** butterflies were seen along with glimpses of unidentified **white** butterflies. **Willow warblers** were singing everywhere but only one **chiffchaff** which, having arrived earlier, was probably already nesting instead of claiming territory. In a canal backwater filled with **bulrushes** we managed to spot a family of **moorhens** with at least two small chicks, and a couple of **mallard** cruised on the canal nearby.

We finished by using the facilities of a charity run community café for ice cream.

David Lampard

RIVERSIDE NATURE PARK

7th May

This was an evening walk to compare the site with our recent winter visit. The cool wind off the river died down and the evening was bright and very pleasant. All the birds seemed to be singing, though not many were actually seen. **Skylarks** were eventually spotted high up above the grassy hill and a **yellowhammer** perched on a convenient branch to sing. **Blackcaps, chiffchaffs, willow warblers** and a **sedge warbler** gave only fleeting glimpses, but a **robin** stopped long enough for us to see that it had a beakful of insects, presumably feeding young nearby.

The small pond didn't look very interesting to begin with apart from the fine clump of **marsh marigolds** at its edge. As we stood and looked more closely a number of **newts** swam vertically up to the surface to take a gulp of air before descending again. There must have been a significant number because there was obvious variation in sizes. Barry was fairly certain that they were **smooth newts**, having checked later.

The larger pond in the field had a large nest mound with a **mute swan** sitting tight and a **moorhen** was seen there briefly. An unfamiliar plant beside the path here was identified as **rough lettuce**, *Lactuca virosa*, by Lyn Jones. As we neared the car park over 20 **rabbits** scattered towards cover - the most anyone had seen in one place for a long time.

Anne Reid

RERES HILL, DUNDEE

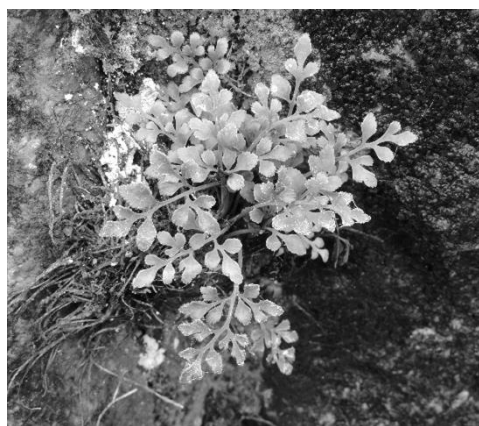
21st May

Reres Hill in Broughty Ferry Dundee was acquired by the city in 1868 and is now a public park of six acres overlooking the Tay. It is probably of volcanic origin and has resisted building development, probably partly because of its hilly nature. The entrance arch was created in 1887 to commemorate the jubilee of Queen Victoria. Today the park has mainly planted trees, but some of the park has been managed with a light hand. There has been some recent storm damage to trees in the park, as in so many other places, and this has been mainly cleared by the Council.

This evening field meeting was a joint venture between the Dundee Naturalists' Society and the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS), recording plants for the BSS Urban Flora project and making other natural history observations.

The evening was mainly dry, but somewhat overcast and 15 members and friends attended. We followed a circular path round the park. Some went up the steep path to the "summit" but a few (including the writer of this report) kept to the lower slopes. I was told that the summit area was more heath-like in the past, so some species may have been lost by the development of woodland.

Over 70 vascular plant species were recorded, all in the same 1km square. Only species that did not appear to have been planted were counted for the urban project.



Near the entrance *Anthriscus sylvestris* (**cow parsley**) and *Alliaria petiolata* (**garlic mustard**) were prominent. *Geum urbanum* (**herb bennet**) and *Hedera helix* (**ivy**) were frequent. Some typical woodland species were noted, including *Allium ursinum* (**ramsons**) and *Moehringia trinerva* (**three-nerved sandwort**). The widespread **bluebells** or **wild hyacinths** appeared likely to be of garden origin (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*).

Near the road *Plantago coronopus* (**buck's-horn plantain**) was found in the mown area, being more usually associated with the shore and perhaps present here because of road salt. The mortared boundary wall featured *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (**wall rue**) (left), so commonly a feature of walls in Dundee near the sea, perhaps partly because of the influence of sea-mists or haar.

Various bird species were seen, including **blackbirds**, **wrens**, **dunnocks**, **coal tits**, **house sparrows**, **chiffchaffs**, **robins**, **crows**, **woodpigeons**, and a beautiful pair of **bullfinches**. On this dull evening few insects were in flight, but a **buff-tailed bumblebee** appeared. Just as we were leaving, a **green longhorn moth** was found resting on a leaf and was much photographed.

Brian Ballinger

BARRY BUDDON

26th May

This joint outing was held earlier in the year this time to vary the species seen. Everything was very wet after rain, which continued for most of the morning. As might be expected this reduced the turnout and very few flying insects were seen.

As usual, the party split into groups and the birders headed off to do their list. Though nothing unexpected was seen there was a **meadow pipit** feeding juicy green caterpillars to a newly fledged youngster near the lighthouse, and a **great spotted woodpecker** nest was found near Happy Valley. A number of extra species were found on the shore including **sanderlings**, **sandwich terns** and a single summer-plumaged **bar-tailed godwit**. The group managed a total of 63 species, despite the weather.

Jim Cook's plant group visited most of the usual sites but found few flying insects due to the weather - at least it dried up after lunch, though the haar came in for a while.

Moth traps had been set overnight at the lighthouse. The worst of the rain arrived around 8.30am as Anne and David retrieved the traps - both got very wet, but at least they had use of the building to empty the traps. The catch was quality rather than quantity - of the 92 moths of ten species, 76 were **common swifts**. The quality remainder included several **fox moths**, **iron prominent**, **pale prominent**, **small elephant hawkmoth** and a magnificent female **emperor moth**.



Anne Reid

SANDS OF FORVIE

1st June

Forvie National Nature Reserve (NNR) is one of the largest natural dune systems in the country. The reserve covers almost 1,000 hectares of sand dunes and dune heath between the North Sea and the estuary of the River Ythan. It is home to a rich variety of wildlife. The great waves of sand change constantly, moved by the wind and tide. Where tussocks of **marram grass** take hold, their roots bind the shifting grains. Gradually, flowering plants and low shrubs cover this more stable ground, creating coastal heathland: another environment for which Forvie is one of the best sites in Scotland. In summer the heath is covered in wild flowers. Forvie has the largest breeding population of **sandwich terns** on Scotland's east coast: they nest in their hundreds in the dunes near the sea. The heathland flowers are wonderful for moths and butterflies.

We travelled north with a comfort break at Brechin Castle. The new(ish) Aberdeen bypass shortened the journey time to get to the reserve compared with our last visit. The bus parked at the car park just across the Ythan and the group headed along the trail around the reserve. After an hour some members went back to the bus which took them to the reserve centre and with difficulty parked there. There were plenty of shorter walks to do from there, while the rest of the group followed the trail.

The trail first followed the north bank of the Ythan, it passed through woodland and then open rough grassland. A branch path offered a shortcut to the coast and the ruins of Forvie church and at least one member took this route. The vegetation changed to heathland with a range of interesting plants along the river and inland. **Cinnabar moths** were seen flitting around. In the estuary all four species of **tern** were seen and **eider** ducks were resting on the sand as well as a few **seals**.

The lower part of the dunes were cordoned off to protect the nesting terns. As we made our way across to the coast the soft sand made walking hard work. However, we met a couple of rangers carrying out a bird count who gave us some tips. Here we came across a group of one of the **eyelash fungi** *Scutellinia* sp., so named because of the eyelash-like hairs around the edge of the bright red cups. There were also dune meadows with **northern marsh orchids**, some in very showy clumps, and a range of dune plants including **birds foot trefoil**, and **wild pansy**.

On the beach were the skeletal remains of a long-dead **porpoise** (photo on page 40). We made our way north up the beach and stopped for lunch at the point where the path headed inland. Some of us noticed a bit of a smell but thought nothing of it. It was only when more Nats arrived they pointed out the dead **minke whale** only a few metres away, which most had not noticed.



After lunch the path rose following the cliffs where there were good views of **fulmar**, other nesting gulls and **cormorant**, **guillemots** and **razorbills**. It was here that Anne and Mike independently spotted a distant **black guillemot** (left), a rarity on Scotland's east coast. Along the top of the cliffs were **silver Y moths**, and a very good view down to the sands of Hackley Bay. We didn't have time to go down and explore the beach, mindful of distance still to walk and the waiting bus. We carried on past Sand Loch where there were two **tufted ducks** on the water and **yellowhammer** and **sedge**

warbler were singing in the bushes nearby. A single flowering plant of **meadow saxifrage** was seen beside the path and all the **creeping willow** was going to seed with the fluffy seedheads transforming the plants.

We finally made it to the reserve centre where the bird feeders had several small birds feeding. Another good day with sunny weather but not too hot with a wide range of birds, plants and insects

David Lampard

ROSSIE PRIORY

11th June

We were lucky to at least get a dry evening for our walk, although it was a bit cold and breezy! Some of the party enjoyed a quick look around Abernyte Church before continuing into the estate. The church has a lovely situation overlooking the Carse of Gowrie and Tay.

Even before we had set off, a **nuthatch** was seen by Kirsty - this has not been a common bird in the area until the last year or two so it was a particularly welcome sight. There were also some **house martins** whizzing about near the church. Probably owing to the time of day, the birds were keeping their heads down, but a **great spotted woodpecker** was heard in the woodland, a **song thrush** was singing and parties of **tits** moved around high up in the tree canopy.

We followed a track down the "Lime Tree Walk" where Barry pointed out that many of the **limes** were affected by a gall caused by a **gall midge**. The walk took us south as far as Castlehill Farm and then east, past the back of the Priory garden. We then made a circular route back to the **lime** trees through the mainly planted south-facing mixed woodland. The ground flora in much of the woodland was **dog's mercury**, and an unidentified **brome grass**. In the more open areas were stands of **hedge woundwort** and occasional **common figwort**. The route took us close to a tall brick chimney which was once used to generate heat for the glasshouses. We were grateful here for the company of Brian and Rosemary Boag - they were a fount of knowledge about the estate as they live nearby.



A number of moths were netted as it grew later in the evening - including an unusual brown form of the **green carpet** (photo, Cathy Caudwell). This form has been particularly noted this year by several moth-ers in the area. We wonder if it could be the result of the rather cool temperatures we have experienced recently.

Cathy Caudwell

NORMAN'S LAW

25th June

Norman's Law was one of the Society's earliest documented excursions, in 1875, which we repeated for our 150th anniversary year, having also celebrated 125 years on its summit.

Unfortunately, the forecast was correct - rain for most of the evening - so it was only five hardy souls who gathered at the layby near Pittachope on the Luthrie road. The grass everywhere was weighted down with water and shed it very easily when one brushed past. Despite this there were still birds about - a **wren** was singing loudly and two **red-legged partridges** retreated up the trackway ahead of us. There were singing **blackbird** and **song thrush** in the trees and a **chiffchaff** nearer the path.

There was no view from the top with the rain and low cloud, but the **meadow pipits** were still singing on the grassy slopes. Only three made it to the top as the slippery conditions of the wet rock on the path precipitated an early retreat for two. On the way back Anne and Barry heard persistent contact calls from within a small **willow** which, after watching and waiting, turned out to be a family of **whitethroats**.

When we got back to the cars Kirsty did comment that her feet were wet - hardly surprising in such conditions! I found that mine were too when I got home. At least it wasn't cold or windy!

Anne Reid



Postscript: It seemed fitting that both Kirsty and Anne (with her Colin) made separate repeat excursions up Norman's Law the following week, when it was dry and sunny. It was worth the extra effort for the views in all directions.

CRIEFF - LADY MARY'S WALK

6th July

The group arrived in Crieff in sunshine and split according to the difficulty of the path and length of walk. The path beside the River Tilt had plenty of interest including some splendid **melancholy thistles**, prolific **sweet cicely** and some **common figwort**, and Cathy managed to spot a few **ringlet butterflies** here. We were somewhat delayed when an **orange tip** larva was spotted (Cathy again!) on **hedge mustard** pods. A second larva and a fresh pupa (left) were then found on the same plant and all were photographed. On reaching Lady Mary's Walk beside the Earn, the trees were larger and, with full foliage, allowed only limited views of the river. Two **common sandpipers**, a family party of nine **goosanders** and a **grey wagtail** feeding a juvenile were seen here.



The real explorers headed upstream towards the David Baird Monument at Trowan where the formerly clear path had become very overgrown, mainly with **bracken** and **rhododendron**. Their return, via Laggan Hill, was punctuated by a heavy hail shower, which those of us under the trees only felt as rain. Jim C did find a few fungi (see below).

On return to the MacRosty Park, some had time for a cup of tea or an ice cream before the return journey to Dundee.

Anne Reid

The vegetation along the banks of the Turret Burn and then the River Earn was dense and obviously thriving. There was a selection of interesting plants, including large examples of **common figwort**, swathes of **sweet cicely** and strongly smelling **wild garlic** along with **hedge woundwort**, a number of patches of **dog's mercury** in the shadier areas, one or two heads of **orchids** which were already dying back and rather difficult to identify and a few healthy plants of **nettle-leaved bellflower** just past the far end Lady Mary's Walk. They could have been garden escapes from the site of an old railway cottage nearby.

It wasn't the best time of year to spot many fungi but a few rather dried specimens could be found. Most of them were best seen up Laggan Hill. They included **jelly ear** or **wood ear brackets**, all on old **elder** branches, a few remaining dead leaves of **hawthorn sweet-leaf** (although they didn't seem to have any smell left), numbers of small brackets of **hairy curtain crust**, **holly speckle** dotting a few old fallen **holly** leaves, several small clusters of **turkey-tail** brackets, patches of old **brittle crust** on old rotted stumps and one or two sycamore leaves showing **tar spot** (right). Unfortunately, several sickening **ash** trees could be seen as well, obviously infected by **ash die-back** disease.



Jim Cook

MORTON LOCHS

9th July

Once again, the forecast rain appeared on cue (are we cursed?) and we took shelter in the closest hide where very little was visible on the water. A single **mute swan** managed to look dejected and a large number of **mallards** were visible in the distance (we counted over 70). Suddenly we noticed a bird flying directly towards the hide which perched on a branch just in front of us all - a **kingfisher**! It didn't stay long, but was seen again several times later from the second hide, flying purposefully up and down along the water's edge.

The rain did ease a little after the hides, so we returned via the old railway track path where we saw a family party of four **jays** in and around the few remaining conifers. A **blackcap** was singing nearby and someone saw a **song thrush**. A swift visit to the south hide yielded a large **toad** in the long grass, but none of the insects which throng this flowery grass path in good weather.

Anne Reid

BROUGHTY FERRY DUNES

23rd July

The weather stayed fair for the thirteen people attending and the group started in the wild flower meadows which are being established over the next few years. Last year there were major works to make the area accessible to everyone, with a cycle path and a wide leisure path at the top of the dunes. The project finished with laying out wild flower meadows, in most of the areas that were previously short, mown grass. The area was originally sown with wild flower mix at the end of 2023 but, due to the heavy rain, had to be re-sown early in 2024.

There was an abundance of **poppies** which had largely gone over, but there was still plenty to see. Birds were mainly on the shore with a selection of gull species and **oystercatcher** and **curlew**.

Perhaps the most exciting were two **stock doves** feeding on some of the remaining mown grass. Insects were so scarce that a **7-spot ladybird** caused excitement.

Following the wild flower meadows, our walk took us back through the Broughty Ferry Nature Reserve. The seasonal pond had largely dried to just a muddy puddle, but we were surprised to see the whole surface bubbling and on investigation it proved to be a large number of **tadpoles**. Not sure if they survived as a bit of rain was needed, and none looked advanced enough to leave the water.

Lorna Ward



PHOTOGRAPHS

Northern Brown Argus
by Alban Houghton

The winning entry in the 2023 photographic competition for the Kim Eberst Trophy. See page 13.

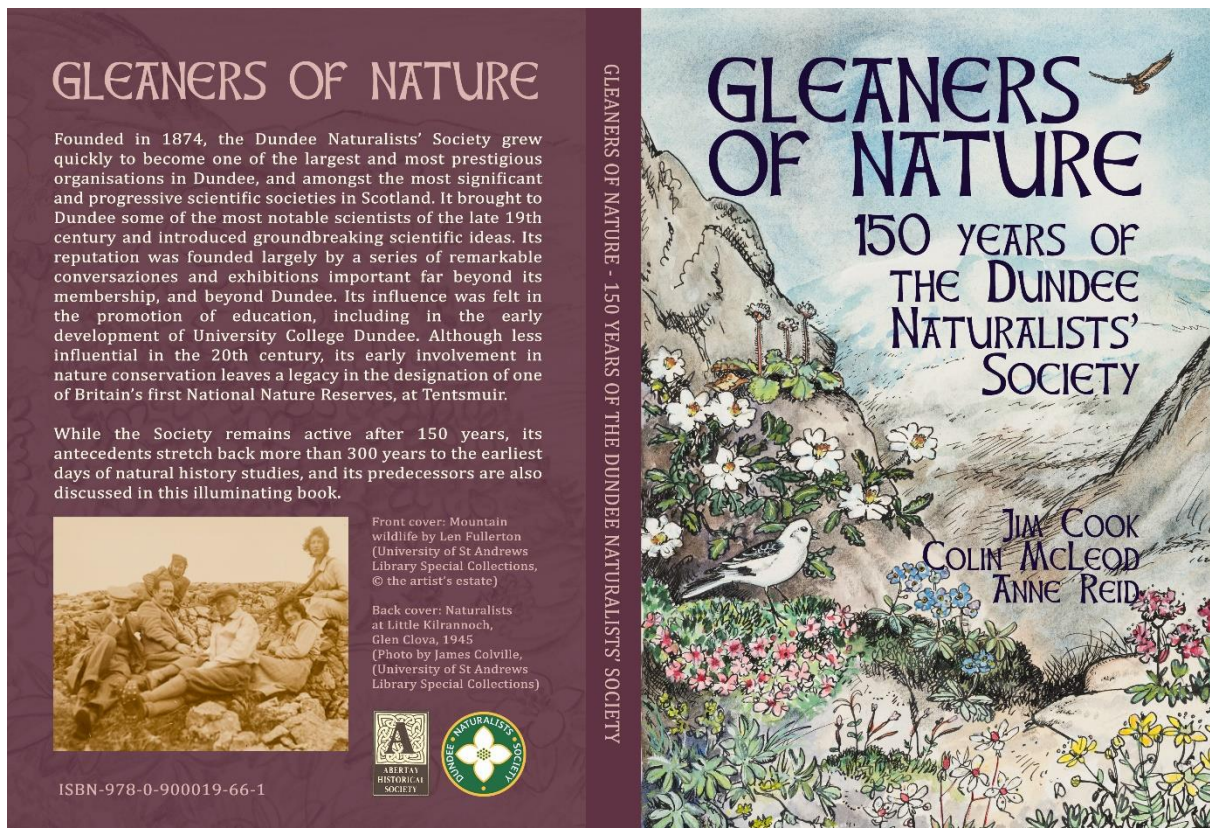
The magnificent show of poppies at Broughty Ferry Esplanade, summer 2024

Photo by Lorna Ward
See articles on pages 19 and 36.





Tree planting day at Carsegowniemuir. Scots pine being planted in memory of Margaret McLaren by her daughter Morag, with help from Ronnie Ogg, Jim Cook and Molly the dog. Photo Anne Reid
 See obituary on page 5 and article on page 27.



The cover of the book celebrating the Nats' 150th anniversary year. Front cover design by Len Fullerton who is also shown in the photograph on the back cover. See article on page 32.

SUMMER OUTINGS (CONTINUED)

CARSEGOWNIEMUIR SUMMER BARBECUE

6th August

A beautiful warm evening greeted a group of 19 hungry members and friends to the quarry. The fire had already been lit in our large barbecue, but most people had time for a walk around the quarry to have a look at progress and sample the numerous, although rather small, tasty ripe **raspberries** and the few remaining **wild strawberries**. It wasn't long, though, before we were called back to the barbecue to put our sausages, burgers and other fare on to cook over the red-hot glowing coals. Soon everyone was joining in the feast and having a good blether among themselves. After all, wasn't this one of the ideas behind the Nats barbecues, as social gatherings to encourage conversations and friendships among members? Loraine and Ronnie Young joined us in mid-feast, along with their dogs, Molly and Whiskers. Both had noses sensitive enough to smell the food virtually as soon as they entered the quarry and bounded along to join us almost immediately afterwards. The Youngs' sausages found enough room over the coals to cook but meanwhile both dogs savoured several 'accidentally' dropped pieces of sausage or burger. All the offerings were gratefully received and went 'down the hatch' so fast that they hardly touched the sides!

We had hoped to spot several interesting butterflies, in particular any **purple hair-streaks** above the **oak** trees, but once again there were no sightings of this elusive species. No predatory birds, not even a circling **buzzard**, showed themselves either. We finished in good time, dealing with the remains of the barbecue coals and carrying the tables back up the slope to their winter shelter on the high ground above. (We'd learned the hard way last year to never leave the tables on the low ground at the barbecue site again!)

Jim Cook

BAMFF ESTATE

10th August 2024

Bamff Estate is located just to the north of Alyth on the higher ground above the Den, at an altitude of about 200 m. The drive in is a little different from the usual grand entrance to a stately home; we were impressed by the large amount of standing and fallen dead wood, some of which was created by the resident **beavers**. We met and parked beside the wonderful big house known as Bamff Castle.



This house has been the home of the Ramsay family and progressively enlarged by them, over many generations. We had been lucky enough to have already received a talk (see page 12) about the more recent programme of wilding of the estate, which had started in the 1980s and 90s. Louise and Paul Ramsay met us beside the house, and we were then treated to a tour around the grounds to the north of the house by Paul, before they had to head off to the Edinburgh Festival. The very breezy conditions and rather cool weather conspired against us in terms of the numbers of insects in evidence. Birds were also in relatively short supply, although we had seen large flocks of **yellowhammers** on the pastures on our earlier recce expedition on 23rd March. We also

encountered the herd of 12 **Exmoor ponies** and three **Tamworth pigs** on that occasion. This area to the north is being re-wetted following drainage in the 18th or 19th centuries. Numerous **toadlets** and **froglets** were hopping in the vegetation there, and **green-veined white**, **ringlet** and **meadow brown butterflies** and a **darter dragonfly** (very likely **common darter**) were observed in this part of the estate. The area is inhabited by a number of **beavers**, while others live to the south of the house in the part known as the beaver wetlands. Considerable interest was taken in some droppings on the ground, which were smelt and examined closely, but not identified as far as I know!

Part of our group circumnavigated the house, down the drive, across the beaver wetlands and back across the meadowland to the back of the house. We had a great picnic, keeping out of the worst of the wind beside the house. **Peacock butterflies** were also sunning themselves there and nectaring on garden plants. Some folk then went on to the Den of Alyth, whilst the rest of the group explored further, and potted for some time on the beaver wetlands and the drive adjacent to that area. A highlight was the magnificent stand of **great spearwort**, *Ranunculus lingua*, in the wetland. We were pleased to see a **painted lady butterfly** beside the walled garden, and it was the only one I saw this year. The **figwort weevils** *Cionus scrophulariae* were introduced to us by Richard Brinklow. These weevils were a most peculiar shape and had completely shredded the leaves of **common figwort** near the drive, giving a strong clue to their presence there. One member of the party (Colin McLeod) continued the walk onto the adjacent hill where **roe deer** were observed to be in evidence. The path he attempted to follow, though marked on the leaflet, was not obvious on the ground!

An estate this size, with wilding as its objective, needs a source of income. Around the grounds the Ramsays have established a number of holiday cottages, lodges and “shepherd’s hut” style cabins with Ecotourism in mind. It was interesting to pass these on our walk around the grounds.

A point of interest is that Stirling University have been involved in monitoring some of the changes which occur as the wilding progresses. There has been a programme of moth-trapping in some of the areas and a photography project beside the wetland. **Barn owl** and other boxes are positioned around the estate. It was from one of these that **barn owl** pellets were collected for our owl pellet analysis session which took place at the Botanic Gardens this spring. The species found in the pellets were predominantly **field vole** with smaller numbers of **common shrew**.

A species list was collated by Anne Reid, which is available on request, and was sent to Bamff for their records. No formal plant recording was undertaken on this occasion. Some members had been there before, both on a group visit to see the beavers some years ago, and by helping with the wilding effort by removing invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* as part of a work party for SWT.

Thanks to the Ramsay family for welcoming us. The group made a donation to the estate wilding effort before leaving.

Cathy Caudwell

CLATTO MUIR

20th August

This afternoon walk was designed to record plants for the BSS Urban Flora at Clatto. In the



absence of Brian Ballinger, Anne led the group of around ten people in a circuit of the reservoir where plants were recorded, but also birds and insects. The strong wind mostly kept small flying beasts hidden away in shelter, though a few **bumblebees** and a couple of **hoverflies** were seen on a windswept **buddleia** (photo Joy Cammack) and a single **peacock butterfly** was also found. Down on the water surface the **gulls** and **ducks** were in relative shelter and seemed unconcerned by the weather (even the very heavy shower when we were halfway round) and up to nine **great crested grebes** were counted, including juveniles, which were probably two family groups.

Around 90 species of plant were recorded around the reservoir ('urban') but only 40 on the Muir and its edges, which were classed as outside the urban area. The edge of the wood was very exposed to the wind and this and advancing time curtailed the visit.

Anne Reid

DUNDEE LAW MOTH AND BAT NIGHT

10th September

We met at the car park half-way up Dundee Law to see what was flying as dusk fell. The main drawback was that the temperature was barely 10°C, though a lovely clear evening with spectacular views all around. Only six members came along, although we were joined by a couple of members of the Friends of the Law later, attracted by the traps. They stayed nearly the full two hours and were duly given Nats leaflets and encouraged to join us.

We set up two moth traps: a battery operated one in the woodland slightly further up the hill and the Robinson Trap in the meadow not too far from the cars, as it is heavier and needed the generator to power the bulb. Anne and Christine prowled around with a bat detector but found no activity - probably because few insects were flying. A single **angle shades moth** was netted by Anne amongst **broom** bushes down near the road (where it was probably warmer) but nothing was seen flying into the traps. After a couple of hours we emptied the traps. There was nothing in the battery one but, to our surprise, a grand total of five **square spot rustics** (right), a common late summer species, in the large trap, along with a couple of large **crane flies** (*Tipula* sp.) and a **frog hopper**. Colin McLeod managed to find a **carabid beetle** in the undergrowth and, as we were clearing up, a micro moth emerged from under the trap, which Cathy later identified as *Epiphyas postvittana*.



David Lampard and Anne Reid

KILLIECRANKIE

14th September

A rather reduced but keen group of Naturalists travelled in a smaller coach up to the car park at the National Trust for Scotland Centre where we met several TAFFG members and Stevie Smith who had just travelled down from a week in the north-west. We split into two groups. Jim led the small fungi group off to explore in detail the ground towards and around the area of the famous Soldier's Leap while Anne led the larger party on a longer walk south towards the Garry Bridge (see below).

The fungal forayers soon gathered a very respectable list indeed, probably due to the continuing damp and rather warm weather as well as the ideal condition of the ground. Considerable numbers of several types of **brittle-gills** could be seen, along with one or two **milk-caps**, **candle snuff** spikes, a few **tough-shanks** and other common species. One of the highlights growing under a **beech** tree, which greatly interested Stevie who'd never seen them before, was a number of fine caps of **old man of the woods**, *Strobilomyces strobilaceus*, a rarely-seen rather shaggy and scaly large member of the Boletus group of fungi. TAFFG member Mark Aquilina found, protruding out of the trunk of an **oak** tree, a fine and easy-to-photograph specimen of **beef-steak bracket**, *Fistulina hepatica*, which looks more like a piece of liver rather than meat, but it does bleed a red, fairly blood-like fluid if cut or damaged. A further interesting find was the most uncommon **moss navel**, *Arrhenia rustica*, in the area close to the viewing point for the Soldier's Leap. The total for the day was more than 70 species from only a small area.

Jim Cook

A disappointingly small number came on this bus trip - if we don't get more participants in future, then we shall be unable to run bus trips with the increased costs.

We started off by admiring the **nuthatches** on the feeders beside the cafe before setting off down the path. The hoverfly *Sericomyia silentis* was seen on **scabious** flowers in the woodland near the centre. A detour to the Soldier's Leap gave good views down the river with just a hint of autumnal colour in the leaves. Though generally drizzly, we only occasionally got wet when a gust of wind

dislodged drips from the trees. Very few birds were about, but we did come across a party of mixed tits which contained a number of **long-tailed tits**.

The 'Green Bridge' was still closed after storm damage, but a short detour took us onto the Garry Bridge, high above the river and the treetops. Just downstream, on the shingle beside the water were four **dippers**, presumably a family party as these birds are usually fiercely territorial.

By this stage the weather was improving, so the walk up the minor road to Tenantry was pleasant, with another **nuthatch** and a **great spotted woodpecker** heard amongst the trees and two **ravens** flew over. After a lunch stop at the church (several benches!) we continued up the back road, where a **giant panda** was spotted in a hedge!! (photo, Mike Sedakat).

At the village of Killiecrankie there was still a pair of **house martins** which seemed to be visiting a nest, and a number of **house sparrows**. We followed the footpath back to the visitor centre where there was time for coffee and cake before returning to Dundee.



Anne Reid

AUTUMN MEETINGS YOU'VE BEEN WHERE? or HOW MY LIFE WENT SIDWAYS

David Pryce - 8th October

The Dundee Nats were treated to an absolutely fascinating talk by the well-travelled entomologist, David Pryce, aka Bug Man (he is known for collecting specimens with a 'ghostbusters' style vacuum). Until recently, he was a freshwater ecologist with the Environment Agency (EA) near Southampton and now cares for his father. As well as being an entomologist, David is a historian, digitiser of documents, photographer, walking tour guide and basically anything else that pays the bills!

Born in Ludlow and later moving to Shrewsbury, the young David was also a fan of trains and happily sneaked into a certain enormous scrapyard (the Barry Railway scrapyard) to see the trains. It might have been that his career could have taken a more mechanical path; however, in October 1994 he saw a **large red damselfly** and was very much influenced by it. He started to read up about the Odonata. He bought Bob Gibbons' books on damsel and dragonflies and now has a collection of books and regional guides on this group that spans six metres of shelves! Odonata are a seasonal thing for him and he later became the national **stonefly** recorder.

David travelled to California and was shocked when he looked out of the plane window to see how inefficient the US irrigation was on the agricultural land. American farmers wasted so much water that desertification is a very real risk. On a happier note, he did see his first **snakefly** (which landed on somebody's bottom!). It was here when he remembered that some wildlife can be pretty dangerous. A mother **black bear** decided to inspect him and allowed her cub to leave a wet nose print on his sleeve. Spotting a **puma** paw print was another reminder that some critters nearby could kill you! Less harmful was the **yellow-bellied marmot** (a large rodent). Botanical critters were also present and he got to see the **bristlecone pines** that were 5,000 years old. He got his picture taken with General Sherman, the large **sequoia** which dwarfed the six-foot tall David. Interestingly, he also photographed a **coyote** and a **roadrunner** on the same day!

David travelled to Florida and saw the **anhinga** (a relative of **cormorants**), a **pileated woodpecker**, snakes and of course, **alligators**. He asked a ranger "How do you spot an alligator?" the ranger replied "Just look for the spare tyre!". An even rarer highlight was meeting the famous astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

David has been to Cameroon twice and it wasn't the city, he went into the 'real' Cameroon (as a Cameroonian friend of his said) the rural and wildscapes away from the cities. He went in 1998 and 2003 and the particular area he went is thought to be the second wettest place on land with regular heavy rainfall. A proper rainforest! David cut his hand quite badly in a knife accident but on the plus side, he did get a species of **cranefly** named after him!

Moving to Scotland, David collected works by Philip S Corbett who was a professor of zoology at the University of Dundee 1980-90 and was a dragonfly specialist. Many of these books and journals are very valuable. David went on to the University of Stirling to study and had a great moment when a **common hawkmer dragonfly** landed on his ear and a fellow student managed to get a good photo of it. David went to work in Perth Museum and Art Gallery where he researched the collection of specimens collected by the Perthshire Victorian naturalist Francis Buchanan White. This amazing collection also had specimens collected by Alfred Russell Wallace which David worked on.

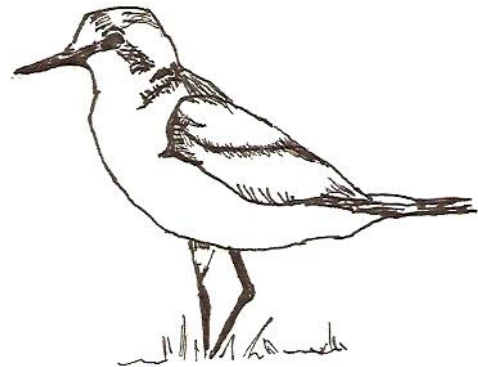
The call of further adventures abroad had reached David again and in 2013 he managed to get a job with Buglife based on the South Atlantic island of St Helena. For a decade this island would be his home. He had some swotting up to do but couldn't find much information other than a book called *St Helena and Ascension Island: A Natural History*, by husband and wife team Philip and Myrtle Ashmole, published in the year 2000. David contacted them and luckily they were based in the Scottish Borders and David visited and had lunch with them. The journey to St Helena is a long one and the main route at the time was through the Royal Mail Ship (RMS), a vessel where you can have a seven course meal! He spotted **green turtles** on his stop off on Ascension Island and helped one that had got stuck.

St Helena is a remote and fairly small island at about a quarter of the size of the Isle of Arran. As a British Overseas Territory it has a cosmopolitan population of people who are descended from places around the world. The population is almost 4,500. The island normally gets 800-1,000 tourists each year and the plan was to increase this to 30,000 but the Covid pandemic and the fact that there aren't enough hotel rooms available put an end to that plan. St Helena is where Napoleon Bonaparte died in exile on 5th May 1821. The island has some fairly amusing or ominous place names such as 'Broad Bottom', 'Sharks Valley', 'Man and Horse Cliff', 'Mole Spider Hill', 'Gorilla's Head', 'The Dungeon', 'Asses Ears' and a forest called 'Scotland' (On a side note: there is reputedly a Scottish island called St Helena where tree cuttings from Napoleon's grave were planted). One amazing man-made feature is Jacob's Ladder, a 699 step walkway going uphill beyond the main town of Jamestown. The record to get up is about five minutes. David's record is eight minutes and he went up twice!

The best way to get around the island was by Land Rover. Licence plates simply had numbers and being a big Douglas Adams fan, David managed to get the number 42 plate (a reference to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) which cost him £12.10 to register. While in St Helena, David was given many strange things including a flying fish which he ate. Only about 1.5% of the land of St Helena is pristine habitat, the way it was before humans arrived, and this is in part due to the hungry **goats** and aggressive alien plants that were brought over by settlers. Between them they have caused much damage to endemic species. St Helena is thought to have as many as 650 endemic species of plants and animals but the figure could be much higher if fungi and other creatures are counted. This makes St Helena a very important island in terms of biodiversity.

Among the species encountered were **black cabbage trees** which are actually eight metre-tall members of the daisy group. A plover known as the **wirebird** and the **fairy tern** which will hover above people are among the rare birds native to the island. The impressive **masked booby** (a close relative of our **gannet**) is a large seabird with a sharp bill. One regurgitated its dinner into the mouth of another researcher who bravely claimed it wasn't that bad! The **spiky yellow woodlouse** thrives on some parts of the island but sadly David had to declare the **St Helena giant earwig** extinct. The **shieldbug of St Helena** is thought by many to be a native endemic species but might actually be a recent migrant from mainland Africa. The island is home to roughly 100 species of weevil. Preying on some of these insects are spiders like the **Melliss' pink prowling spider** (David got to invent many common names for species that didn't have one!). Another common mini-beast was the **blushing snail** which is a splendid shade of red. David was quite fond of the **St Helena brown lacewing**.

David performed spider surveys by flashing a special torch into the desert at night seeing the light reflecting from the spider's eyes! The numbers were impressive, so much so that it was a bit of a mystery where they could find an adequate amount of prey in that area! Among the most frequent spiders were the **lurking wolf spider**. David needed permission from the police to be there and to take



St Helena Wirebird
Charadrius sanctaehelenae

photographs as there are some military and police bases on the island, including that area. Invasive species included **scorpions** and large **centipedes** which could give a man a nasty bite.

The ocean had its wild inhabitants too. David saw **dolphins**, **humpback whales** and **whale sharks**. St Helena is a very special place for **whale sharks** in particular as elsewhere there are areas where solely males or just females visit. St Helena is the only place where 50% male and female mixed groups congregate. Individual whale sharks can be identified by their distinctive spotted patterns and there is now a whale shark named after David swimming the Atlantic Ocean. It is called SHA147 'Bugman' and is the size of a bus!

David enjoyed snorkelling and was investigated by an inquisitive **hawksbill turtle** and it might have thought that David was a jellyfish! David got his photograph taken with Jonathan the **giant tortoise** who is at least 190 years old.

David did return now and then to the UK and one of his trips was to search for St Helena specimens within the collection of the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. He took photographs of insects and came to the extremely common **house fly** and one grubby specimen came from St Helena. It didn't seem too special until David read the label that stated that it was collected by a certain C Darwin in 1836!

The journey to St Helena has now been made much easier thanks to the construction of an international airport. 8.1 million tonnes of rock was moved to make the new airport and at the time it was the biggest infrastructure project in the southern hemisphere! Pilots are only allowed to abort a landing once and then they have to land on the Ascension Island airport instead; St Helena is one of two P.O.N.R. (point of no return) locations in the world, the other being Antarctica. The RMS no longer makes journeys to St Helena and had a tearful farewell journey with locals waving the ship off. Fortunately, the ship is in much demand elsewhere!

From David's talk the Dundee Nats learned that St Helena is a stunning island, home to the **fairy tern**, Jonathan the **giant tortoise** and many other inhabitants. They also learned quite a bit about a scientist who has been adventuring in biology abroad and at home since the 1990s.

Mike Sedakat

Note: The illustration of the wirebird was drawn by Leonore Goodliffe to illustrate her Bulletin article after a visit to St Helena in 2008. This can be found in Bulletin 33, 2008, page 31. Ed.

TREE-PLANTING DAY CARSEGOWNIEMUIR

19th October

Only a fairly small group of Naturalists and friends gathered in the morning at the barbecue site to help in what will probably be our last large tree-planting session in the quarry. Fortunately, the weather was kind and the day held no problems for us. There were a number of small trees ready with posts and matting beside the prepared holes (although we dug a few more); eight **pin**es, four **oaks** and several small **hazels** and **rowans**. In the few weeks previously, when digging the holes, we'd found the soil to be quite powdery due to the spell of unprecedentedly dry weather at the end of the summer. Fortunately, in the week before the planting day there were several fairly heavy showers which made the task of planting the young trees so much easier and more certain. Even then, when checking that



the bottoms of the holes were free of any large stones, we found in places that the sub-soil was still rather dry. Before starting, the whole party gathered to plant a fine young **pine** in memory of Margaret McLaren. Her daughter Morag came along to do the honours (left, and page 21). Ronnie Ogg and several others then began planting the rest of the **pin**es along the south bank and had a number in place before returning to the barbecue site to begin cooking our food. Colin Reid, in particular, did a power of work and planted several young trees on his own and then Duncan McGregor and his son Shamus joined in to help with our efforts.

After a satisfying BBQ lunch the party continued on with the planting task. Colin again showed a very willing hand with a pick and shovel and it wasn't long before we had planted all the trees - a very respectable total of 16 for the day by only a small number of participants. Once again Anne dealt with the remains of the hot coals while the rest of us tidied up and carried the tables onto the higher ground.

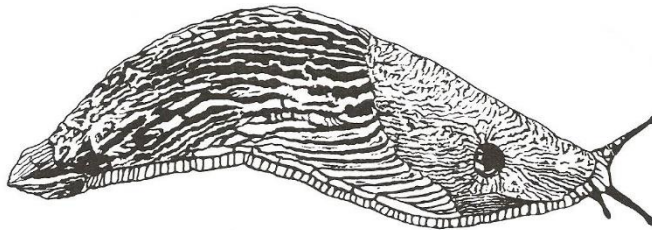
Jim Cook

SLUGS: UNLOVED, UN-NATURAL AND UNDER-RECORDED

Chris du Feu - 22nd October

Advance publicity and an effort to extend an invitation to members of gardening and allotment societies was successful, and this thoroughly entertaining talk attracted over 40 people and 120 slugs, although the latter had no say in the matter. The date had been chosen as one of the best times of year to find a good range of species. Slugs were brought in a great variety of containers from places as far afield as Dollar, Arbroath, Alyth and Auchtermuchty. The speaker took them away (two crates-full!) for identification at the end of the evening, and provided a detailed report on his findings a few days later.

Using maps from NBN Atlas, the lecture highlighted how thinly scattered were slug records in the Dundee area. The specimens brought to this talk, and another given to the PSNS the following week (which also saw some specimens from Dundee), resulted in a total of 170 records of 19 taxa, of which 66 represented new 10km square records, proving the 'under-recorded' aspect of the title. Surprisingly, Perth seemed to have seen rather more recording than Dundee in the run up to the 1999 *Atlas of land and freshwater molluscs*, although not subsequently. While these new records are a valuable



contribution to science in themselves, the real hope is that more people will take up recording of this group. Most are easier to identify than people think, and the distributions of many species are changing rapidly due to climate change and movement of horticultural materials, giving only a brief opportunity to record these changes before they happen.

For example, there were 16 specimens of *Ambigolimax* sp., relatively recent arrivals in the UK; one, from Alyth, awaits dissection to confirm its identity to species level. There was only a single record of the familiar **large black slug** *Arion ater* - it is being replaced by incomers including a more westerly native *A. flagellus* and two species introduced from the continent, *A. rufus* and *A. vulgaris*, all of which were brought to the meeting. Most species in this subgenus occur in a confusing range of colours, so any large black slug is not necessarily *the* large black slug!

Of the soil slugs *Arion* (*Kobeltia*) subgenus, there were only five records for the formerly ubiquitous *A. distinctus*, which once would have been expected in just about every garden. It is retreating with the rapid spread of two related species that until recent years were scarce or absent in Scotland, *A. hortensis* and *A. owenii* - which had five new 10km records between them.

Amongst common pest species, the **tramp slug** *Deroceras invadens* arrived in the UK in 1931 and has only reached Scotland since the 1970s, but now occurs as far north as Shetland and is often abundant in gardens. Our specimens provided six new records, but also several for the very common native **milky slug** *D. reticulatum* - in this case the arrival of an ecologically-similar invader doesn't seem to be affecting the established resident. There were two new records of the introduced **Budapest slug** *Tandonia budapestensis*, a major pest of **potatoes**, and one of the longer-established **Sowerby's slug** *T. sowerbyi*.

Even for the widespread, common native **dusky slug** *Arion subfuscus*, three of the five records were new dots on the map. There were only two specimens of the speaker's favourite, the **tree slug** *Lehmanna marginata*, neither of them from Dundee - it is not particularly attracted to gardens. The most spectacular specimens were those of the **green cellar slug** *Limacus maculatus*, which has spread extremely rapidly and is the species most likely to leave slime trails in kitchens and outhouses, and the native carnivorous **tiger/leopard/great grey slug** *Limax maximus*. Although these very large, striking species are sometimes confused, the differences between them are obvious when the two are seen

together. Unsurprisingly, there were a good number of records of both, producing several new dots on the map.

Those who wish to pursue slug identification were recommended to get the most recent book on the subject, the *FSC guide to Slugs of Britain and Ireland* by Rowson *et al.*, www.field-studies-council.org/shop/publications/slugs-aidgap. Anyone who would like to read Chris's full report on the slugs, please get in touch.

Colin McLeod

EASTHAVEN

26th October

Having given relatively short notice of this Saturday morning walk, Anne was pleasantly surprised that we actually had eight walkers. Though breezy, it was actually relatively mild with some sun, though you wouldn't have thought so from all the scarves and hats. Though near high tide, it was a neap tide so many of the rocks were still uncovered, providing refuges for a number of the shore birds, which included **oystercatchers**, **redshanks**, **turnstones** and a single **bar-tailed godwit** along with a selection of **gulls** and some **cormorants**. Further along towards the mouth of the Craigmill Burn were a lot of **wigeon** and a pair of **mallards**. Over the field just behind the shore one, or possibly two **skylarks** were singing, to the surprise of some. They will sing occasionally in winter if the sun is shining (which it was by now). Three **redwings** flew low along the back of the shore - the first of the winter for many - and **pied wagtails** seemed to be everywhere.

Though little of interest had been washed up by the tide, we did look at a number of shells, including **blue-rayed limpets**, which feed on the **kelp** fronds.



Anne Reid

INSPIRED BY ALICE BALFOUR, A PIONEERING SCOTTISH ENTOMOLOGIST

Katty Baird - 5th November

Katty lives in East Lothian and has been recording moths for about ten years now, both in her free time and work time. There are about 2,500 moth species in the UK (compare that to 59 resident butterfly species) so for variety she recommends you go for moths!

A brief overview of moths was covered. It's easy to set out a moth trap and hand out egg boxes containing moths the next morning, so they are good for sharing with people at events. As part of an ecosystem moths are important as pollinators, which happens after dark. More essentially they are also food for other animals. They can also be used as indicator species; by recording what is present then inferences can be made about the health of the environment.

There is a lot of good information on moths in the UK as there are detailed records and they have been studied for a long time. They also store well in collections. Studying the entomology collections in Edinburgh, Katty discovered Alice Balfour, who lived between 1850 and 1936. She lived in East Lothian at Whittingehame House near Garvald. Alice recorded both butterflies and moths there.

Alice's family were interested in science and politics. The eldest son of the family, Arthur J Balfour, was Prime Minister for a while. He didn't marry and neither did Alice so they lived together, with Alice running the household to support Arthur. She was a good scientist and brilliant artist and became a great friend of Edward Bagnall Poulton, the evolutionary biologist. She bred moths for him

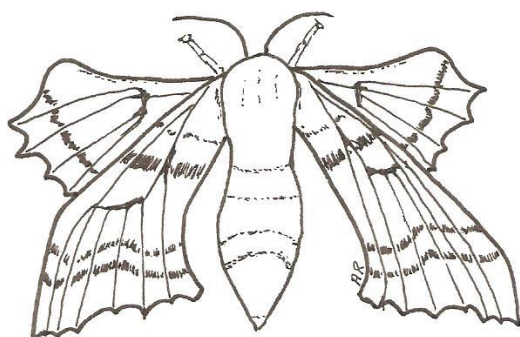
and helped him look at results. Another relation, her niece Eve Balfour, founded the Soil Association in 1946.

Alice became an elected Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society in June 1916. She bequeathed her collection of moths to the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) which contained over 8,000 specimens, all from East Lothian. She had collected for at least 69 years. You could say she was the first County Moth Recorder as she tried to understand the moths across the county!

Katty wondered what the places were like that Alice had trapped in so she did this for a year or two. It became not just about how the moths have changed but how recording has changed in the last 100 years. Alice's notebooks in the museum collection started in 1913. She liked lists, and detailed what moth to see where. She kept a diary and noted species she didn't necessarily pin. She also recorded negative records as well as her moans about the weather and lack of moths. World War 1 interfered in her work as sugar was rationed, and it was inconvenient to her that light couldn't be put out on a certain side of the house. She had cataracts in the early 1920s, but had them fixed so was able to take up moth recording once again.

Katty gave us a summary of how methods have changed over time. Our modern traps are lightweight and have brighter bulbs which produce the majority of records now. Alice did have a light trap at her house but it disappeared so Katty was unsure what she used, but didn't think it was run all night. Alice also used sugaring which is a good way to attract moths but not as productive as a light trap. All entomologists have a net and the NMS in Chambers Street has Alice's hessian net.

Alice did a lot of hunting for caterpillars (larvae) and was far more active than us. These can be hard to spot but provide really useful information such as finding out the food plant and confirmation that a moth was breeding there. In terms of numbers, Alice had recorded 266 species by 1936. Katty recorded 370 species between 2014 and 2024.



Katty went through some of the macro moths, illustrated with wonderful photos. Alice saw nine species which no longer occur in East Lothian. This includes **heath rivulet** and **Portland moth**. However, there are many remaining species still around. Katty found **poplar hawkmoth** (left) which Alice recorded as "rare" but for Katty now it is more common. **Merveille du jour** was recorded by Alice as "very common at sugar. At rest on trunks of trees in afternoon". Katty doesn't see so many and had no success looking at tree trunks, yet she has seen more **merveille du jour** in ten years than Alice saw in all her years.

Newcomers - not seen by Alice - include **Blair's shoulder-knot** (found northwards) and **canary-shouldered thorn**, which would have been around in Alice's time but she never saw it. It is possibly more abundant now but she may have overlooked it.

The **herald** is one of Katty's favourite moths and is the focus of her project Hibernating Heralds. It is widespread across Scotland, UK and the northern hemisphere but not often seen and in small numbers. Alice had **heralds** in her collection but considered them to be rare. She noted it could be found in sheds and goes to sugar. So Katty checked out a culvert and icehouse on the estate. At the weekend prior to the talk she found 42 moths in it. Dundee may not have any records yet but two were recorded in Lunan Bay in the pillbox there. (*Update. David Lampard recorded four heralds in a pillbox on Dundee Law a couple of weeks later*).

The **emperor** is a day flying moth but can occasionally be found resting. The caterpillars are easy to find on heather by sweeping. Alice had pinned them at Whitewell. Nowadays it is easy to buy a lure for around £40, so Katty drove out to Whitewell, got the lure out, and saw the moth on the hillside.

Katty and Alice were going about hunting moths in the same way but the big difference between them now is how they are recorded. Alice was wealthy and had books and contacts. She used C G Barrett 1907 (11 volumes) and the Edward Meyrick book (no illustrations). She asked for help when struggling to identify moths. It was a long process as she had to send them to London and wait for an identification to come back. Nowadays we have it much easier with books and a huge online resource. We have digital cameras which are very immediate. AI recognition is available which is not always right, but it's not bad! We have lost some fieldcraft compared to Alice's day though.

Katty finished her fascinating talk to remind us all that with so many records available in the National Moth Recording Scheme (10 million) it's easy to forget that someone is sitting in the field creating those records. Appreciate the connection between the person and the moth, go out and enjoy your wildlife.

Eleanor Stamp

Note: Katty's blog link online <https://kattybaird.co.uk/alice-blanche-balfour/>

ALASKA

Eric McCabe - 13th November
Joint with RSPB, SOC and ADBC

There was a good turnout at the Glasite hall for Eric McCabe's talk and slide show on his holiday in Alaska. Eric held his audience's attention as he showed his wildlife photos, and told us about some of the places he had visited. These including some offshore islands, more difficult to access for visiting and observing the local wildlife.

Liz Olejnik

THE WORK OF THE BSBI SCOTLAND OFFICER

Matt Harding - 26th November
Joint with the Botanical Society of Scotland.

Matt Harding described the Work of the BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland) and his role as its Scotland Officer. He has held this post for two years following on from Jim McIntosh, the first holder of this role.

The BSBI is responsible for recording the flora of Britain and Ireland and has now published three Atlases, the latest being the recent Atlas 2020. This is available as a large two volume printed version and also in a convenient on-line form.

The Scottish membership of BSBI has increased in recent years, now numbering about 540 of whom 55 are volunteer Vice-County recorders who collate the botanical records from their area. As well as being the employed Scottish Officer, Matt is also a volunteer recorder for Stirlingshire. A major part of his job is his role in supporting the Scottish volunteer network and this creates a considerable amount of correspondence. There are also a large number of issues and activities to deal with.

The new botanical atlas has revealed some worrying trends, including a 47% decline in native species and a 66% decline in ancient introductions (archaeophytes). Recent arrivals (neophytes) on the other hand, have increased by two thirds. There has been some movement north of plant species, probably related to climate change and a recent arrival in Scotland is **bee orchid** (*Ophrys apifera*) (right), which has appeared in several places in southern Scotland in recent years. Some northern species have become more vulnerable.

The BSBI has been developing local links, including setting up local groups and working with other societies. The annual New Year Plant Hunt has been a great success, involving increasing numbers of people and the National Plant Monitoring Scheme is looking at long-term trends.

The BSBI organises a series of plant identification workshops and runs a full programme of field meetings across Scotland. There have been recent field meetings studying *Alchemilla* (**lady's mantles**) and *Hieracium* (**hawkweeds**). The Annual Botanical Conference in Edinburgh is coordinated by Matt and this year attracted around 220 attendees.



Matt described some special Scottish plants, including the rare **small restharrow** (*Ononis reclinata*) on the Mull of Galloway and the rare **alpine catchfly** (*Silene suecica* or *Lychnis alpina*) on Meikle Kilrannoch. Recent survey work on the **sticky catchfly** (*Silene* or *Lychnis viscaria*) at Dumyat in Stirlingshire has mapped a very large population of this rare plant.

Throughout his talk Matt conveyed the beauty and interest of our Scottish flora and the importance of conserving it.

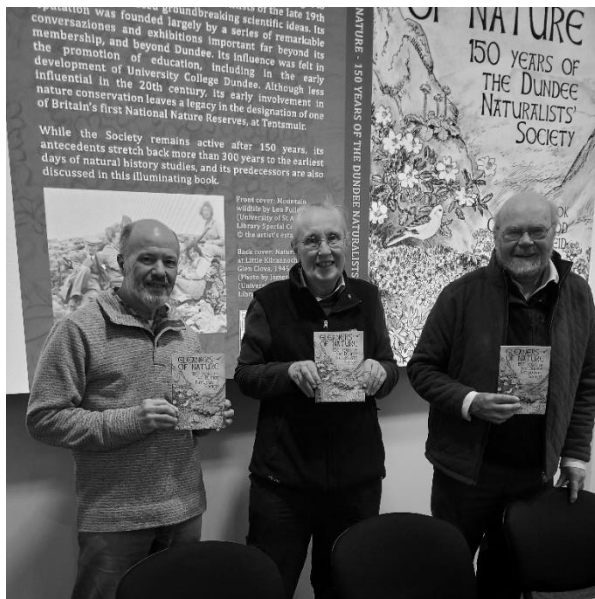
Brian Ballinger

BOOK LAUNCH

'Gleaners of Nature - 150 years of the Dundee Naturalists' Society'

Jim Cook, Colin McLeod & Anne Reid - 3rd December

This joint event with Abertay Historical Society had around 50 attending to hear short talks by the three authors summarising the history of the Society from 1874 to the present day, and predecessor bodies dating back as far as the 1700s. It followed broadly similar proportions to the book, with about half the lecture covering the period up to 1900, and the rest focusing on modern times and the development of Carsegowiemuir Quarry nature reserve. Afterwards there was a book-signing, and members of the two societies were able to collect their free copies. Further copies can be purchased at Society meetings, priced £7.50 - a real bargain for such a quality publication.



Publishing in partnership with AHS meant some compromises had to be made, but brought considerable advantages and savings - we benefited greatly from their experience of printing, distribution and sales, and our book becomes the latest in a long and widely-respected series. It is only the second of the annual AHS titles on the history of an organisation that is still extant (the other being on The Nine Trades of Dundee), but is a good 'fit' with several of the other books, particularly *Growing and Forming* (2017), on our illustrious former member D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, which was co-authored by another member, Cathy Caudwell; *The Watt Institution, Dundee, 1824-49* (1978); and perhaps more unexpectedly, *Creatures of Fancy, Mary Shelley in Dundee* (2019), which features several of the characters active in our early predecessor bodies. All are listed on the AHS website <https://abertay.org.uk>, where older out-of-print

publications are also available as free downloads.

The cover painting has attracted a lot of interest. It is by Len Fullerton, the well-known local nature (and comic-book) artist. (See colour illustration on page 21) He exhibited his paintings at a members' night in 1939, and subsequently became a leading light of the Nats in the 1950s & 60s, to the extent that the Society barely survived his sudden death in 1969. His family have donated most of his archive to St Andrews University Special Collections. We wanted something that showed both plants and animals or birds, to illustrate the variety of interests covered by the Society; that fitted portrait format without needing to be cropped; that was in colour; and that wasn't familiar from being previously used in greetings cards, calendars etc (as many of Fullerton's were, albeit 50 years ago or more). The painting shows species that might be found in the Angus or Perthshire hills, and seems to have been prepared as a cover for a book on mountain wildlife, but never used - perhaps because the soaring eagle got in the way of the title. Fortunately, Photoshop now enables it to be moved aside! Book cover design has moved on over the past 60 years, so it has a somewhat 'retro' look to modern eyes, that seems appropriate for a history book. The back cover subtly uses a drawing of mountain plants from one of Fullerton's sketchbooks as a watermark, placing a flower of dwarf cornel next to the Society's logo that features the same species. The back cover also has a photograph of a group of naturalists (not all DNS members) in the Angus Glens in July 1945, showing the artist (the middle of the three

gentlemen), next to Ellis Crapper, another prominent member at the time (wearing pale jacket). The cover design & layout is by Matthew Jarron, the Editor for Abertay Historical Society.

More can be read about Fullerton at <https://bearalley.blogspot.com/2006/12/len-fullerton.html>. Perhaps the use of his art for our cover will help revive interest in his work.

Colin McLeod

Photo of the three authors at the book launch by Lorna Ward.

THE ANGUS GLENS

Alban Houghton - 10th December

As usual, the Christmas meeting attracted a good turnout of nearly 40 to hear Alban give a short photographic tour starting with Glen Esk in the north, and working south and west via Lethnot, Clova



and Prosen to Glen Isla, including some of the side Glens. It was nice to see photos of some of the alpine plants that feature on the cover of '*Gleaners of Nature*' (see above), along with some of the animals and birds of the Glens. It was a reminder of the times when the Society was able to undertake hill-walks on its excursions, and visited many of the places shown, like Glen Doll, Lochs Brandy and Wharral, and Glen Mark. Reference was made to moorland management including **red grouse** and of the conflicts over muirburn and **red deer** stocking levels. The sun always seemed to be shining, but Alban admitted that he only went to the Glens when the forecast was favourable!

The talk was followed by refreshments with a wonderful spread brought by members. We also held a raffle to raise funds, with prizes having been donated by a number of members for that purpose.

Anne Reid & Colin McLeod

MEMBERS' ARTICLES

RED FLASH

1st August

We were sitting in the hide having lunch when I noticed a sudden flash of red-brown among the dense vegetation on the other side of the bird-feeding table. What was it? Then the animal shot up the half-dead **ash** tree to the north of the feeders. Beautiful, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed – a handsome **red squirrel**! The animal soon bounded down, pushed through the vegetation and then nimbly shot up the post of the feeder table. It reached over and began taking pieces of peanuts from the hanging feeder. A **great spotted woodpecker** flew in just then but took one look at its competitor and disappeared.

Jim Cook

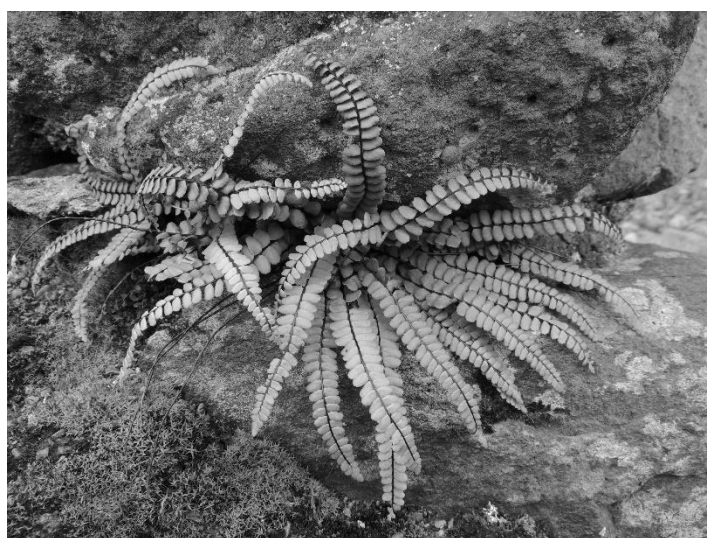
URBAN WALLS - A PLANT COUNT AND ZONATION

Mortared walls in towns often provide a habitat for plants and some species adapt well to this environment. Other species may also put in more transient appearances on walls.

I previously reported on the plants growing on 50 Dundee walls (Ballinger 2020). A striking finding was the presence of more species on the higher parts of the walls, 1-2m above ground, in comparison to the lower parts of the walls, 0-1m above the ground. The bases of the walls have a different flora, which is more akin to the wild plants usually seen on pavements and the wall tops also differ in other ways.

The present study reports on the number of individual plants growing on the lower and higher parts of the walls in a sample of Easter Ross and Dundee walls. The bases and tops of the walls were not included in this survey.

Method Twenty 50-metre sections of mortared walls were studied in Tain, Invergordon and Alness and



also in a similar way in Dundee. The numbers of individual plants of the various species were noted, as well as their position on the walls. Some immature plants could only be identified to genus level. The study was carried out in 2024.

Results The number of individual plants of the more numerous species in Easter Ross appear in Table 1. The species with the largest number of plants recorded on the 20 walls in Easter Ross were: *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (**wall rue**) (104 plants), *Asplenium trichomanes* (**maidenhair spleenwort**) (90) (left) and *Cymbalaria muralis* (**ivy-leaved toadflax**) (67).

Table 1 Easter Ross Walls

| Species | Number of plants 0-1m above ground | Number of plants 1-2m above ground | Total |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| <i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i> | 2 | 102 | 104 |
| <i>Asplenium trichomanes</i> | 13 | 77 | 90 |
| <i>Cymbalaria muralis</i> | 41 | 26 | 67 |
| <i>Poa annua</i> (annual meadow-grass) | 17 | 12 | 29 |
| <i>Linaria purpurea</i> (purple toadflax) | 8 | 16 | 24 |
| <i>Epilobium</i> (willowherb) | 16 | 2 | 18 |
| <i>Taraxacum</i> (dandelion) | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| <i>Cardamine</i> (bitter-cress) | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Pseudofumaria lutea</i> . (yellow corydalis) | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| Other | 5 | 13 | 18 |
| Total | 108 | 269 | 377 |

Other species 0-1m above ground in Easter Ross: **thale cress** (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) (1), **ivy** (*Hedera helix*) (1), **wall lettuce** (*Mycelis muralis*) (2), **rosebay** (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) (1). Other species 1-2m above the ground in Easter Ross were *Arabidopsis thaliana* (2), *Hedera helix* (4), *Mycelis muralis* (2), **blackcurrant** (*Ribes nigrum*) (2), **snowberry** (*Symphoricarpos albus*) (2) and *Chamaenerion angustifolium* (1).

In Dundee the commonest species on the 20 walls were *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (190 plants), *Asplenium trichomanes* (113 plants) and *Cymbalaria muralis* (72 plants),

Table 2 Dundee Walls

| Species | Number of plants 0-1m above ground | Number of plants 1-2m above ground | Total |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|-------|
| <i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i> | 31 | 159 | 190 |
| <i>Asplenium trichomanes</i> | 21 | 92 | 113 |
| <i>Cymbalaria muralis</i> | 18 | 54 | 72 |
| <i>Cerastium sp (mouse-ear)</i> | 6 | 25 | 31 |
| <i>Senecio vulgare (groundsel)</i> | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| <i>Polypodium vulgare (polypody)</i> | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| other | 11 | 11 | 22 |
| total | 95 | 347 | 442 |

Comment The usual “wall specialist” species, *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (**wall-rue**), *Asplenium trichomanes* (**maidenhair spleenwort**) and *Cymbalaria muralis* (**ivy-leaved toadflax**) were the most frequent species, as in my earlier report. Also, as in the earlier 2020 report in Dundee, the *Asplenium* species were considerably more frequent in the upper 1-2 metre part of the walls. In Easter Ross, unlike the Dundee sample, the *Cymbalaria muralis* was not more frequent in the upper wall section. The other wall specialist, *Pseudofumaria lutea* (**yellow corydalis**) was only recorded on the upper sections in Easter Ross.



An earlier study of individual plants on Dundee walls suggested that plants of *Asplenium trichomanes* may have a limited lifespan, but appeared to colonise readily. Only 55% of *Asplenium trichomanes* plants were to be seen in the same location after the elapse of a year but the number of plants was maintained.

Possible reasons for this distribution include salt application to roads and paths in winter and the frequent use of herbicides at the base of the wall. There are also other habitat differences between the upper and lower section of the walls, including light exposure and water availability. The possible effect of other factors such as wall cleaning by humans, wall structure, competition by bryophytes and grazing by invertebrates is uncertain. The east coast of Scotland experiences frequent sea-mists or haar, which may bring extra moisture to the walls and influence plant growth, probably favouring the small ferns. This may be less marked in some of these Easter Ross sites than in Dundee.

The number of plants of other species is relatively small, so it is difficult to reach any conclusion about their distribution on walls. These mortared stone town walls are an important habitat, especially for small ferns.

Brian Ballinger

References.

- Ballinger B. (2020) *50 Walls in Dundee* BSS News 115: 24-27
 Ballinger B. (2024) *Dundee Walls - A Plant Count* BSS News:123: 20-22
 Brian Ballinger brian@garrickwood.org.uk

ITEMS OF WILDLIFE INTEREST

These are all submissions from Jim Cook, in addition to those he submitted for the Newsletter. This section used to be much longer, but most members now submit sightings to the Newsletter at the time.

16th January In a thin layer of newly-fallen snow, the distinctive tracks of a **red fox** could be seen outside the house (Broughty Ferry). As in previous years, the prints came across the back garden and then straight over the fence into the neighbour's garden.

19th January Woke up very early in the morning, around 2am, to hear the rather high-pitched triple barks of a lovelorn **red fox** outside. By the way the barks were sounding over a few minutes it must have been trotting along the road outside, very quiet at that time of the new day.

20th January Heard two (or possibly three) **great tits** belting out their distinctive two-part 'tea-cher' calls in Carsegowniemuir Quarry at about mid-day. A sign of the spring to come?

22nd January In the evening, around 9pm, the rather plaintive calls of a lonely **red fox** could be heard in the park nearby.

27th January A large skein of **pink-feet geese** flew over the house soon after dawn, presumably on the way to feed on grass somewhere inland.

8th February Woke up early to hear a **song thrush** start to tune up his throat, with the promise of a dawn chorus to come as the spring progressed.

7th March Several shredded skins, probably of **toads**, along with some jelly, were seen in the shallow water at the edge of pond 5 in Carsegowniemuir Quarry. Were they the remains of toads caught by a **heron** and their toxic skins peeled off before being swallowed?

21st March Heard a few brief calls, a **chiffchaff**, somewhere in Carsegowniemuir Quarry during a visit there.

25th April A sighting of a **pine marten** in the oak wood, only about 100m to the south of the quarry, was reported by Loraine and Ronnie Young. (However, no sightings, tracks, droppings, feeding remains or other signs have been recorded actually in the quarry, so far. We remain hopeful.)

12th July A number of butterflies, among them at least two **peacocks** and a **small tortoiseshell**, were sunning on the house wall.

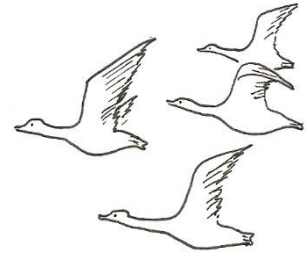
17th August Heard an unusually harsh screech from along the road in the evening and wondered what had made it. Perhaps it was from a **heron** that had been disturbed.

3rd November Several large skeins of high-flying geese, probably **pink-foot**, flew over Broughty Ferry in the evening, probably on the way to roost for the night on the Tay.

7th November The unusually large number of six **teal** together in a tight group were noted on pond 5 of Carsegowniemuir Quarry.

21st November A total of 19 **mallards**, a record, along with two **teal**, were seen on pond 5. Probably shooting in the area around the top of the ridge to the north had frightened them off the ponds up there.

18th December In the early evening darkness in Broughty Ferry, the calls of **redwings** flying over could be heard above the noises of traffic and people below.



BROUGHTY FERRY WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

In the UK 97% of natural wildflower meadows have been lost since 1930, which has had a knock-on effect of the loss of invertebrates that are vital for pollination of crops. Wildflower meadows provide a home for insects and other wee beasties.

On Broughty Ferry Esplanade the cycle path was upgraded to link Monifieth and Broughty Ferry with a safe cycle route, part of a much longer East Coast cycle route. While the project was a cycle route there was an agreement that this would also include walking routes, dune protection and soft landscaping. The soft landscaping introduced a new native grassland management with a bespoke seed mix including more than two dozen native wildflowers including **cowslips**, **vipers bugloss** and **kidney vetch** to provide a source of nectar throughout the growing season.

Users of the Ferry were subjected to several months of roadworks, road closures, large construction vehicles, reduced access to the beach in places, and the previous green spaces being ploughed up and fenced off. The green spaces were sown with the wild flower mix and out of bounds initially with a view to move the fences by spring '24. However, storm Babette had other plans and deluged the whole area and it all needed to be replanted.

The results were spectacular with a vast area of **poppies** in the summer drawing visitors to the area (see photo in colour section, page 20). The Esplanade during the summer has been well used with the wide path on the edge of dunes also having plenty of seating for people taking the time to sit a while. It remains to be seen when the fences will be removed and if the varieties of wildflowers bring in more insects, and butterflies, but on a warm summer day it is a lovely spot to watch the world go by.

Lorna Ward

See also the outing on page 19.

REMEMBERED HISTORY

Much of what is related below was originally planned to go in the 150th anniversary book, 'Gleaners of Nature', but had to be omitted for reasons of space. Some of the 'stories' have been written about in past Bulletins, but in the early years of the publication not all activities were recorded. If there is a Bulletin account then the reference is included. The Bulletin was first published for 1976-77 and all copies are available on the Society website. Even where a Bulletin account exists it may tell a different version of the events below, or not mention them at all!

As the 'Gleaners of Nature' records, our Society almost collapsed for a second time in 1972 but was saved by the efforts of Vice-President Elizabeth Leitch, Bob Philip and Joan Thompson. The Council of the time did their best to hand over the business in an orderly manner to the new Council. In fact, Mr EJ Henderson, the former Society President, continued on as Treasurer for a year or two.

The book describes the general activities continuing, but a new venture was to attempt to organise a Society outing suitable to mark the significance of the 100th Anniversary in 1974. This was as well as the large Society dinner organised with well-known television personality Tom Weir as the guest and principal speaker. At first, a week in Norway was contemplated but was found to be far too expensive for most members. Instead it was replaced by a weekend in spring based in Dumfries. This trip proved highly successful and led to the many enjoyable weekend excursions in the succeeding years.

Not all were equally successful, however. Notable among these was the weekend on the island of Bute in 1980. We'd travelled over in time to catch the ferry from Wemyss Bay and arrived in good order to take over the booked hotel in the centre of Rothesay. However, later after dinner that evening one elderly member unfortunately died, despite attempts at resuscitation. Her shocked husband was collected early the next morning by his son, who'd driven across in time to catch the first ferry. At breakfast the President was forced to announce the sad news and a vote was taken to cancel the weekend. The general feeling, though, was that the lady who'd died

would have wanted the weekend to continue and so we did. The Saturday was a lovely day and the group all enjoyed the interesting walk around the southern tip of the island, seeing several notable plants and birds.

However, on the way, the group at the front found a **sheep** stuck on a narrow ledge, with not a blade of grass left, above about a 10-foot drop. Alastair Fraser and Brian Allan in particular managed to grab the starving and desperate animal and, with some difficulty,



wrestled it down unharmed. Unfortunately, nobody below managed to get a firm hold on its fleece and the panicked sheep ran off down the slope and straight into the sea. Before anyone could pull it out the poor creature drowned. The body was left on the beach where a shepherd or the farmer, who clearly didn't check his flock very often, might find it.

The weekend's dramas weren't over yet, though. On the Sunday the party was supposed to walk down a nature trail to the coast, then along a short stretch of beach and

seashore rocks to rejoin our bus for the return to the ferry and back to Dundee. In the event the bus took us up a narrowing track with bushes brushing both sides of the vehicle and then stopped. We'd come to the end of the road and at that point the leader announced that we'd just completed the nature trail! The bus driver was not best pleased at having to reverse all the way back down the track. After that everything went well. The party enjoyed the leisurely walk round the coast, with extra time to look at the plants and animal life, and take the bus and ferry back to the mainland and home. It was 30 years (2011, Bulletin 36) before the Society again attempted a weekend on the island, this time a longer 4-day one. The second weekend went very well until the Monday when a powerful gale blew up and the party was forced to cut short the planned visits on the way back but otherwise returned unharmed.

Perhaps the other most memorable weekend, for the wrong reasons, was the one to Fort William in 2012 (Bulletin 37, page 15). It wasn't long before several members reported themselves ill. The sudden onset and rapid effects indicated an outbreak of the dreaded Norovirus which had been rampant that year in the country. Nearly everyone, including both the leaders, succumbed apart from a few who were already immune. Fortunately, the effects generally lasted only about a day and most were well enough to return with the bus-party back to Dundee. One or two, though, had to be collected specially and driven home. Apart from these individual major crises, the weekend itself was interesting and enjoyable.

Over the years, however, the vast majority of weekend trips were both well-organised and led, with few problems, and very interesting as well as being hugely enjoyable, even great fun. By being able to travel further than on a normal day trip, we were able to take the opportunity to visit a number of outstanding wildlife sites and areas around Scotland and Northern England and see a wide variety of unusual or rare plants and animals. These included long-distance excursions as far south as Whitby (2013, Bull 38), to as far north as the Gairloch in Ross and Cromarty ('16, B41) and Strathpeffer ('81, B6; '14, B39), from Skye ('94, B19), Oban ('95, B20; '08, B33) and Lochgilphead ('78, B3; '04, B29) to Inverness ('99, B24; '05, B30), Speyside ('77, B2; '86, B11; '91, B16; '96, B21; '10, B35), Aberdeen ('89, B14) and Macduff ('01, B26), from Arran ('02, B27; '17, B42) and Ayr ('79, B4; '00, B25) to Galashiels ('87, B12) and Berwick on Tweed ('75, no report) and from Silverdale, near the Lake District ('92, B17; '06, B31), to Bamburgh

and the Farne Islands ('83, no report; '90, B15; '03, B28). These continued without a break until the Covid-19 pandemic brought all such activities to a crashing halt. We will have to see whether these weekend trips are ever revived. (There is a list of weekends from 1974 to 2000 in Bulletin 25, page 7.)

A more unusual series of weekends were the four autumn weekends in the 1980s, organised by the Technical Convenor, with members travelling by car and staying in hostels. The idea was to allow the younger and more active members to find out more about various techniques of surveying wildlife, both animals and plants. The first was to Glen Clova with the Youth Hostel as the base but the Saturday was very wet. Fortunately, all were well clad and booted and fully protected against the conditions.

The second weekend was to Pitlochry, investigating the woodlands and ponds round about and then on to Moulin Moor and the base of Ben Vrackie where the party estimated the effects of deer browsing and the distribution of **petty whin**, *Genista anglica* (below). There would be two more of these study weekends.

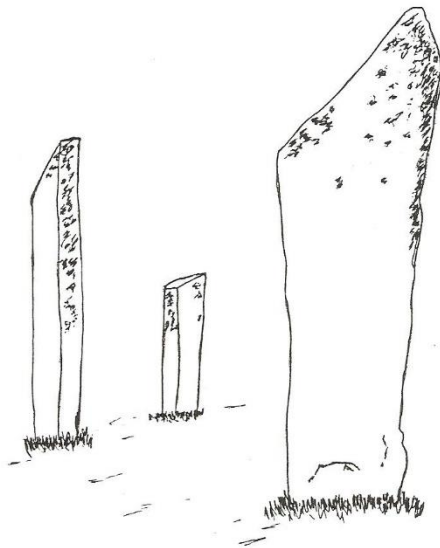


One was to Glen Clova again, this time to a much improved and more comfortable Youth Hostel. We were able to set out an organised series of small mammal traps, go bat hunting with a detector and deploy moth traps, use butterfly nets, sweep nets and beating trays to sample a variety of day-active insects and try out transect and large and small quadrat techniques for various plants.

The other was the autumn weekend at Aviemore and to Loch Morlich and the walks and woods around it. This time the weather could hardly have been better. On the Saturday the group walked up to the Green Loch and surveyed the old-growth open forests around there and then on the Sunday the whole party enjoyed trips in hired rowing boats onto the Loch and the use of a variety of apparatus and techniques to sample the water conditions and aquatic life and study the results.

In the 1970s a week's visit by car to the far north coast of Scotland was organised for interested members by Joan Thompson and led by Dr JB Kenworthy from Aberdeen University.

Then in the mid-1990s one President organised three week-long trips (open to all members) in a hired minibus to take the group to sites never visited before (or since) by an organised Nats party and open to all members. The first was to Orkney in 1995 and gave us the opportunity to explore many sites of wildlife and archaeological interest on the Orkney mainland, such as the famous **Scottish primrose** site at Yesnaby, the cliffs at Marwick Head, a small bird loch near Isbister and the Gloup of Hamar as well as to the Tomb of the Eagles on South Ronaldsay, the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, and tomb of Maes Howe, the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness (below). The party also explored several of the islands including South Ronaldsay and Burray, Birsay, Rousay and Hoy. As well as a memorable visit to the Highland Park distillery, we made time to meet up with a well-known former member, Mollie Lind, who had retired to Kirkwall on her home island. She invited us all

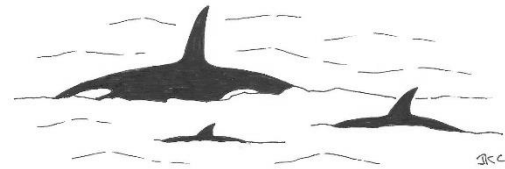


in for a cup of tea and biscuits with her (which, she told us later, mystified all her neighbours to her great delight).

The following year the minibus trip was to the Outer Hebrides and took us from South Uist, across Benbecula to North Uist, giving us the opportunity of visiting Loch Drudibeg, Balranald and its **corncrakes**, and a sea loch and its **otters**, as well as to several good **machair** sites and to look for unusual orchids. Then the party took the small ferry to cross over to South Harris and travel up towards Stornoway. From a base there the minibus took

us to Callanish and Dun Carloway and several interesting sites and further on up towards the Butt of Lewis.

The final year took a minibus-load to Shetland and the week there gave us the opportunity to visit many of the special wildlife and archaeological sites of the archipelago. The party travelled from the far southern tip of the mainland at Sumburgh Head and Jarlshof up to several good places around Lerwick (though we dipped out on the **bee-eater** reported the first morning but were able, instead, to tick off Bill Oddie on our lists!) and a number of other mainland sites. Perhaps the



most incredible sighting was a group of **orcas** hunting seals just offshore, close enough to hear clearly, when the party was inspecting the site of an ancient **soapstone** quarry, near Cunningsburgh, a short distance above the road - seeing the same pod a short while later on a boat trip out to the island of Mousa and its uniquely almost-intact Broch (with brooding **storm petrels** inside its walls). We also enjoyed a superb trip to Fetlar, with a good view of a large **otter** on the way, and were able to enjoy lunch beside the small loch with several extremely confiding **red-necked phalarope** circling in the water only yards away while **whimbrels** called from atop fence posts. Another terrific day was taking the ferry from Lerwick to the island of Bressay and then across to a small boat crossing to Noss. We spent several hours there, dodging dive-bombing **arctic skuas** and settling down for a while above the cliffs to admire in close-up the abundant and very confiding **puffins**. The group also visited the northern islands of Yell and then on to Unst where we were able to find several notable plant species but a planned visit to the most northerly Scottish reserve of all, Hermaness, was prevented by the outbreak of a fierce storm with high winds and driving rain.

As well as these Society trips to places and sites in Scotland and northern England, families, small groups of Naturalist friends and individuals travelled and explored all over southern Britain and to Europe, to Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Scandinavia, Germany and France but especially to a number of Mediterranean countries including Greece, Crete and Cyprus, Turkey, Italy, Spain and the

Balearic Islands, Portugal and even the Canary Islands and Madeira. Modern cheap and fast air travel in the last 30 or so years have made it possible for individual members or pairs to

travel worldwide, often then lecturing to the Society about the wildlife encountered.

Jim Cook

Two extra photos to fill the space!

Porpoise skeleton found at Sands of Forvie (see page 16).



Group looking over the Soldier's Leap, Killiecrankie (see page 24).

