

# Dundee Naturalists' Society

Instituted 1874



# Bulletin No 38 2013

**DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**  
**ANNUAL BULLETIN No 38**  
**2013**

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**CONTENTS**

Society Reports:	Page 2
Obituaries:	Page 4
Winter Meetings 2011:	Page 5
Summer Outings 2011:	Page 10 and page 24
Photographs	Page 22
Autumn Meetings 2011:	Page 25
Members' Articles:	Page 31

The new Bulletin cover illustration is by Shelagh Gardiner and shows the Society's emblem, the dwarf cornel. Other illustrations are by Anne Reid, Jim Cook, Brian Allan, Christine Reid, Mary Reid and Artfile. Two pages of colour photographs have been included this year. All other, unacknowledged photographs are by Anne Reid, except that on page 4 which is Brian Allan's.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Thanks to all members who have submitted articles and reports, especially those who have done so for the first time this year. Thanks to Colin Reid, Jim Cook, Christine Reid, and Mary Reid for proof reading and helpful comments (Mary and Christine via e-mail).

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

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

Anne Reid

## SOCIETY REPORTS PRESIDENT'S REPORT

My third, and last, year as President has passed very quickly and seems to have been packed full of Nats activities. All the usual events took place - and none the worse for that - with a much better summer contributing greatly to the enjoyment of our outings. Despite serious misgivings when we discovered that the Whitby weekend was to be an English Bank Holiday, we were blessed with hot sunny weather throughout and managed to avoid any huge crowds or traffic jams.

We tried a strategy of taking our normal Saturday outings to places further away than usual, in the hope that more members would be attracted to visit places they perhaps would not drive to, with the hope of increasing the numbers on the buses. We still had disappointing attendances, and despite increased fares made an overall loss. Nevertheless, Council had agreed to subsidise trips if necessary as bus outings are seen as one of our main activities. Please join our outings and bring your friends; we aim to have a choice of walks to suit all tastes and abilities.

While on the subject of buses, it must be recorded that we shall be changing company next summer. Charlie Riddler, of Riddler's, Arbroath, decided that it was time to retire. Riddler's, and often Charlie himself, have driven us on our outings and weekends for over 20 years and have shown patience and great driving skill, especially in turning a bus in a confined space - even with forward planning all it takes is one car driver in the wrong place to make what, on the recce, seemed an easy turning spot into a nigh impossible one. Charlie will be much missed, but we sent him best wishes from the Society for a long and happy retirement.

The lecture programme continues to be well-supported and we have had talks on subjects ranging from Midges back in February, to Atlantic Hazelwoods in November with forays to Trinidad (birds) and Tristan da Cunha (plants) to add an exotic touch. All these activities are described at greater length elsewhere in this Bulletin.

Finally, I would like to thank all those people who have supported my presidency and kept the Society running smoothly: Secretary, Lorna Ward; Treasurer, Dorothy Fyffe; Excursion Secretary, Davie Stein and all other Council Members who perform a wide variety of tasks. I wish my successor well and look forward to being able to do more of all the other activities on my extensive list!

Anne Reid

**Stop Press:** The 2013 photographic competition was won by Jim Smith with his shot, titled 'Bracken Buck', of a young **red deer** stag and is reproduced on page 23. A full report will appear in the 2014 Bulletin.

## CARSEGOWNIEMUIR QUARRY REPORT

It's good to report that the quarry has done well again this past year and most of the trees have grown strongly, despite the dry summer. It's even better to report that, so far at least, there have been no signs of **ash die-back disease** or any of the threatened **oak** diseases. We can only cross our fingers and hope! The hide has had a sprinkling of visitors, most of them regular Nats, although a few have been non-members. The feeders suffered somewhat in the winter gales but remain popular with our avian friends. Work on improving the surroundings of the hide and the access paths continues.

The water levels were still very high in January, following the December flood, but gradually dropped until they were back to about normal by the middle of February. Deep snow and spells of heavy rain up until the late spring maintained the moisture content of the soil. During drier periods in early spring three of the large **willows** at the western end of pond 3 were pollarded once again to open up that end of the pond to the sun and to allow easier entry of the larger local water-birds. A few of the largest cut branches were planted on the northern bank at the far end of the pond as an experiment to see if they might take root and help block the view of the hide from the road. (In the event, the dry summer prevented that.)

We were very active this spring, and planted a total of 33 trees. On a snowy early spring day Ronnie Ogg came along to help plant three **pin**es (supplied by himself), several **hol**lies (from Dorothy Fyffe) and one or two **ash**. A few weeks later Keith Cohen and Alastair Eberst brought in a number of **oaks** and **birch**, for which they enthusiastically dug holes, and then planted and protected them.

Many were placed in the gap between trees on the north side of the quarry, by pond 3, the aim being to help block the view of the hide from the road. Peter Ellis, at Barry Mill, was generous enough to donate about 50 healthy self-sown **ash**, a few **birch** and one or two **hawthorns**. Half a dozen of these were planted the next weekend in **willowherb** areas by Liz and Adam Olejnik and the rest were dug into good soil beside Keith's smaller trees to grow on, ready for the next planting season. Some herbaceous species were brought into the quarry as well. As an experiment, a dozen small clumps of

**wood sorrel** (*Oxalis acetosella*), from wild plants in my garden, were planted under the **hazels** and **ash** between ponds 1 and 2 to help reinforce the local population. A few were seen growing later in the year but it will be next spring before the total surviving is known. A total of ten rhizomes of **common male fern** (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) were transplanted from along paths at the cottage end of the quarry to sites under the **pin**es at the far end. Several of these, also, were re-found in the autumn, growing well. Along with the pair of **hollies**, the aim is to help establish a ground layer of vegetation to prevent the wind from whistling straight through under the pines. It is already becoming clear that, as the trees begin to mature and shade the ground, the lower branches die off to open up a windy gap under the lowermost branches and around the trunks.



**Wood sorrel**

The brasher came into action again during the height of summer to clear the paths, mostly of **rosebay willowherb**. The dry conditions this year meant that only two days' work were sufficient to clear all the paths to a satisfactory width. Interestingly, some of the main paths are showing the effects of the continued thorough clearance in that the **willowherb** isn't growing nearly as strongly along the sides of the paths. Unfortunately, though, this more open zone is being taken over by dense growths of **nettles**. Another obvious effect, due to the reduction in numbers of **rabbits** following the ferreting activities of the Falkirk group, is that grass growth in the quarry has been much greater than usual and the brasher had to be used to clear some of the paths across the grassy central 'plateau'.

In early October Dorothy Fyffe came along to plant four of her potted **ivy** plants at the bases of selected trees. They were protected with wire and piled stones to prevent any **rabbit** damage. This was a repeat of an experiment by Margaret Duncan who found that ivy would grow only where protected inside the exclosures. A beneficial effect of both the wet spring and the lack of rabbits this year has been that a considerable number of self-sown **ash** seedlings have survived and continue to grow in the area of dumped stones between ponds 1 and 2. Four of these now are protected by wire mesh cylinders and will, we hope, continue to thrive. They are the first such self-sown trees to survive for any length of time.

At the same time we surveyed a number of the **ash** trees, both mature specimens and ones planted by Nats' members, for any signs of **ash die-back disease**. I'm very pleased to report that there were no signs of any tree diseases, apart from **Dutch elm disease** (which appeared years ago) and the unimportant attacks of **tar-spot** disease on the leaves of **sycamores**. Also a few of our young **oaks** had **oak mildew disease**, but they should grow out of it, and a number of the larger **oaks** carried populations of **leaf spangle galls** and **marble galls**. That's the good news. The bad news is that experience in Denmark has shown that ash die-back disease spreads at a rate of some 20km a year, even without human help. Worse, we know it is rampant in parts of southern England and has been recorded already in places in Scotland. Furthermore, although it is known to rapidly kill saplings, the disease also eventually kills most large trees as well. The only slight hope is that ash trees form a genetically highly diverse population and a few trees appear to show some resistance. I wonder if there'll be any ash left in the country - let alone the quarry - in 20 or 30 years' time? Time for crossed fingers!

The autumn planting season began strongly, with Ronnie Ogg coming along to help dig holes and plant seven trees (five **ash** and two **hollies**), mostly near the hide, close to the **rowan** that had been transplanted earlier. He had brought some old and rather tatty geotextile and, as an experiment, this was used to mulch the trees. He also had the good idea to bring along two old metal and plastic stools that will form a great addition to the seating in the hide. Mention must also be made of new volunteers Mike Sedakat and Jackie MacKay who are to be congratulated for their efforts.

Jim Cook

## TECHNICAL CONVENOR'S REPORT

The Society was involved in two Bioblitzes, one in June in Dundee at Middleton Woods organised by the Countryside Rangers, and one in August organised by the RSPB at Loch of Kinnordy.

At Kinnordy, Nats members contributed towards plant, mammal and insect records. A bat walk was led by David on the Friday evening and moth traps were set up. Anne and Richard did their best to compile a full plant list in an afternoon, including lichens, after David and Anne had run and emptied three moth traps. A total of 321 individual moths of 40 species was recorded - not bad for one night's work. The overall number of species was around 350 across all groups.

In addition we are using some of our Tuesday evening meetings as special recording meetings, but fully incorporated into our syllabus.

David Lampard

## OBITUARIES

DOUGLAS PALMER  
1932-2013



I first met Doug at an S101 (Science Foundation Course) tutorial, thirty years ago. Later, as we both studied second and third level OU Earth Science subjects, Doug was part of a small local self-help group. Very knowledgeable and highly skilled in all matters technical, Doug was always willing to share his expertise with others.

Doug was an enthusiastic member of Dundee Naturalists' Society and served as Nats Secretary from 1995-1999. He was at the forefront of the species recording and spent many hours adding to the Nats computer database. Sadly, Doug's first wife Molly, also a Nats member, died after a long illness. A few years later, Doug found happiness again with second wife Jean, whom he met through the Nats.

Quite simply, Doug was one of the nicest, most helpful and cleverest persons I have ever met. He is sadly missed.

Jenny Allan

When I first took over as Editor of the Bulletin we did not have a computer at home and I learned my computing and editing at the Nats computer which Doug, as Secretary, had at his house. This involved many visits during which I did a lot of typing - in those days most contributions were hand-written. Doug was always most welcoming and helpful, though we did have to call in Brian on occasion when neither of us could solve the computing problem!

Anne Reid

## ROMA MILLER

Sadly, Roma Miller died on 27th March 2013. She was Excursion Secretary for six years from 1997 and continued as a member, with her husband Duncan, after that. They attended outings regularly until unable to do so.

## WINTER MEETINGS

### ST VIGEANS NATURE TRAIL

2nd January

On rising, the day did not look particularly promising with heavy rain already falling. However by the time we met up in the car park at 10.30, to be greeted by Jenny with most welcome and warming mulled wine and delicious cake, conditions were fair and mild, pretty much perfect for our walk. Though known as St Vigeans Nature Trail, the path along the former railway is officially called Waulkmills Nature Trail.

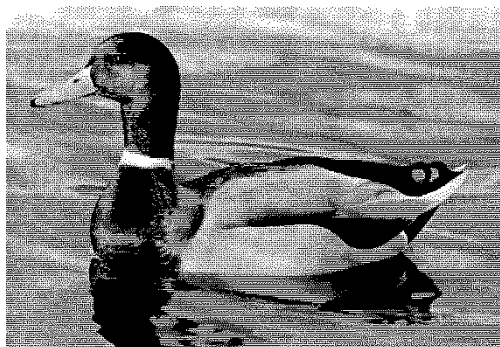
On commencing the trail, the extent of previous flooding and waterlogging soon became apparent as the field on the left behind the cemetery resembled a large pond. Normally just a bit marshy, with a **heronry** at the far end, this looked unlikely to be draining away anytime soon. **Mallard** and **moorhen** were evident, with the usual assorted **gulls**, **rooks** and a couple of **herons** which only put in an appearance when the group were returning.

Some of the members stopped to investigate the emerging buds of **butterbur** growing over a tree stump and on the bank of the Brothock Burn. Further along, many fungi were still apparent, which was nice for the "fungiphiles" among us. Thankfully, the **scarlet elf cup** fungus which I had been carefully monitoring for the occasion, was still performing well and was much admired and photographed.

At this point, which is about two thirds of the way along the trail, most of us decided to make our way back to the car park for the barbecue and a hearty cup of soup, made by yours truly, although a few fit Nats decided to carry on and walk to the very end of the trail and back.

The weather remained pleasant enough for us all to enjoy eating in the outdoors, and fine to be able to use the facilities of St Vigeans Hall. Nice weather and great company - a wonderful start to the New Year.

Stevie Smith



## RESEARCHING RAINFOREST BIRDS IN TRINIDAD

Alan Barclay - 15th January

This was our first talk in the New Year of 2013, and the evening was eagerly anticipated by myself and many others. It was well attended and Alan set the scene initially by describing the project, which involved staying for six weeks a year for five years, studying the survival rates of tropical birds at three sites of varying altitudes, which he later described in detail, and passing the findings onto the Trinidad Authorities. He then described the geology and geography of the island of Trinidad, which lies close to the mainland of Venezuela. Fascinating to hear that the island's mountains are in fact the outliers of the Andes, and of a height similar to Scottish mountains.

Alan shared with us not only his stunning bird photographs, but also gave us an insight into his fascinating background and role in the research, introducing too, his colleagues, several of whom were present in the audience. We were able to view candid images of the everyday living arrangements, with 12-14 persons sharing the accommodation and the challenges of cooking - as Alan described it - mainly 'fork food', with intermittent power problems. We were entertained by the sight of rows of bird bags suspended from the walls in the living and working quarters, suspiciously resembling undergarments of a delicate nature! I think we were all relieved and amused to discover they were part of the bird trapping programme, in conjunction with mist nets.

In addition to working in such circumstances, Alan described the hardship of 'roughing it' in a van with no seats, which must have been very uncomfortable if travelling any great distance. Culture is such on Trinidad also, that feuding gangs and criminal behaviour are not an uncommon occurrence, as is the illegal trade in smuggling rare **blue** and **gold macaws**. Another hazard

disclosed by Alan was the presence of poisonous snakes, including the irritable and unpredictable **fer de lance**. However, greater risks were also present from the natural world in the shape of limbs and even whole trees crashing down during torrential rain.

In addition to the birds, other wildlife encounters included **howler monkeys** and **caiman**. Highlights for myself included photographs of a **green honeycreeper**, **chestnut woodpecker** and **tufted coquette**, the second smallest bird in the world, but all the bird images were dazzling and so different from our own species. I was intrigued, as I'm sure others were too, regarding the team's gadget for recording climate data and also the need for special pens for recording information due to rainforest conditions. Alan continued to enlighten us further with detailed information on the different habitats, the great variety of species he encountered, the different aspects studied and his various findings. Particularly interesting then to learn that the birds are long-lived with few predators and they therefore only need to reproduce by laying small clutches of eggs.

All too soon Alan's informative and entertaining talk came to an end. Following a lively question session, all that was left was to give the vote of thanks and invite those present to show their appreciation.

Stevie Smith

## MEMBERS' NIGHT

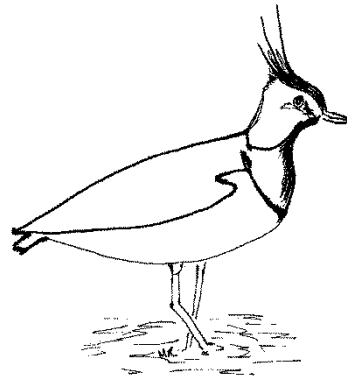
29th January

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

### Photographic Competition 2012

The subject for the competition for 2012 was 'British Wildlife' and this attracted 15 entries from members. In order of receipt, these were:

Maria O'Neill:	Kittiwake and chick
Brian Williamson:	Jew's Ear Fungus
Davie Stein:	Jay
Alban Houghton:	Puffin
Bob McCurley:	Dark Green Fritillary Butterfly
Jon Cook:	Heron with Pike
Stevie Smith:	Whitewig
Liz Olejnik:	Red Admiral Butterfly
Adam Olejnik:	Lapwing on Islay
Clare Reaney:	Hedgehog
Joy Cammack:	Wet Bee on Astrantia
Daphne Macfarlane Smith:	Bottom's Up!!
Jim Smith:	Yellow Amber
Anne Reid:	Towering Foxglove
Jim Cook:	Why so Melancholy?



The competition was judged by local photographer Ken Drysdale and Lorna Ward, from the Nats Council, and all administration was done by Brian Allan. These three must all be thanked for contributing to the success of this second year of the competition, as must all the members who submitted entries.

The winner was Jon Cook, with his stunning heron action photograph, and he was presented with the Kim Eberst Memorial Trophy and a certificate by Brian. (Winning photograph printed in 2012 Bulletin.) Second and third places were Jim Smith and Anne Reid, respectively, who were both presented with certificates. Congratulations to all three, and especially to Jon for his second win in a row.

We then moved on to the compilation of members' photos which Brian had put together for the main part of the evening. The first item was to have been some of the videos from the trail camera which had captured images of **roe deer**, **rabbit** and **foxes** at Carsegowniemuir. Despite

working on Brian's computer, they failed to play on the University system so will have to be shown at a later date! The rest of the presentation went without a hitch and the images shown were:

Alban Houghton 'Glencoe' **Early purple orchid**, **moss campion** and Nats on the visit at the end of the Fort William weekend in May. A July re-visit with **grass of parnassus**, **yellow saxifrage** and **mountain avens** on the limestone of Meall Mor. A final photo of a **golden-ringed dragonfly** munching a **bumblebee**.

Brian Allan 'Cevennes to Pyrenees' A selection of **orchids** in the Cevennes including **man orchid**, **monkey orchid** and the hybrid between them and fine specimens of **burnt orchid**. Then mountain scenery with a **daffodil**, *Narcissus abscissus*, the Pyrenean endemic *Antirrhinum molle* and a splendid *Raymonda myconi*.

Davie Stein 'Tayside Birds' Portraits of a **heron** at Tayport, **greylag geese** at Loch Leven, **waxwings** and **fieldfares** in the Western Cemetery, a **yellowhammer** at Templeton and **goldfinches** and a **jay** in the garden. A **grey wagtail** on the Dighty, a **turnstone** at Stannergate and **cormorants** at Westhaven completed the set.

Stevie Smith 'Fungi, Bugs and Beasties' A composite of 20 images covering 60 hours of the life of a **slime mould** which had involved photos during the night - true dedication to natural history especially as a **leopard slug** had to be removed half way through the process to prevent it from eating the subject! Close-ups of **moth antennae** and **dragonfly** faces and some **sawfly larvae** in threat posture. **Bog beacon** fungus and **bluebell** portraits from the Fort William weekend and a **fly agaric** with the white scales so numerous and undisturbed that they looked like snow on the cap.

Jim Smith 'A Wildlife Medley' Flying birds, including **jays** and a **maggie**, and a **grass snake** with a bothersome **fly**. Portraits of a **beautiful demoiselle**, a **four spot chaser**, a **small skipper butterfly** and a **purple hairstreak butterfly**, all in Dorset. The final image was of a very fat, sleeping **grey squirrel** which had been heard snoring!

Brian Ballinger '2012 Highlights' Gale damage in Brownie Wood and Tarroul Wood and **foxes** and **waxwings** in the garden. New finds at Morrish More of **frog orchid** and **small blue butterfly** and also **eel grasses** on the Tain Plaids. Trips to Jordan in March and Taiwan in October gave us a taste of these countries (and an idea for a future lecture? Ed.).

Bob McCurley 'Creepy Crawlies' Starting with a rare fungus find of *Volvariella bombycina* on Barry Buddon before moving on to a lovely image of a backlit **garden spider**, a **longhorn beetle** and a **cream spot ladybird**. **Field gentians** near the lighthouse at Barry Buddon and **small pearl-bordered fritillary**, **green-veined white** and **small blue butterflies**.

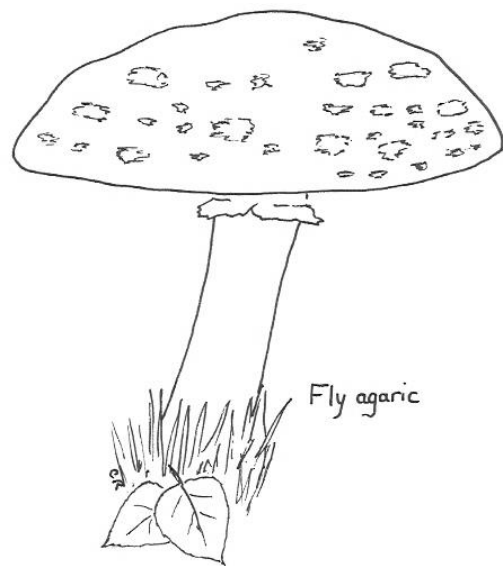
Anne Reid 'Birds, Beasts and Butterflies' Shore birds including **knot** and **redshank** and an unusual view of the two Tay Bridges from far out on Monifieth Sands at low tide. New records of **emerald damselfly** and **black darter** for Carsegowniemuir, a wet **peacock butterfly** at rest on the Balkello outing in May and a **six-spot burnet moth** on **ragwort**. Unexpected **fallow deer** at Dunkeld and a **red squirrel** at Threave.

Dorothy Fyffe 'Spanish Wildlife' Taken on the June birding trip from Barcelona to the Pyrenees we saw three different sorts of green **parakeets** in Barcelona. Out in the countryside several **butterflies** and an amazing 19 **storks' nests** on an electricity pylon. In the mountains were **Pyrenean columbine**, **spring gentians** and **trumpet gentians**, a tiny pink *Dianthus* and an **earwig** and **violet dung beetle**, shown specially for Stevie!

Jim Cook 'Just Hanging On!' Cliff plants, including **purple mountain milk vetch** and **alpine milk vetch**, on Ben Vrackie and Nats clambering up to look at them. A gnarled old **Scots pine** near Loch Shiel and a series of photos chronicling the preparations for and installation of the hide at Carsegowniemuir and its official opening and camouflage painting.

After such a varied selection of images Brian and all the contributors were thanked for making it such a successful evening, once again.

Anne Reid





## MIDGES

Alison Blackwell - 12th February

Alison Blackwell's interest in biting **midges** started when she applied for a PhD in Aberdeen. She set up Advanced Pest Solutions in 2004 and moved to Dundee in 2011 as a company to help mitigate the effect of biting midges. Her talk covered the biology of midges, their impact on industry and lifestyles and ways of coping with these insects.

Biting midges affect food production, health of livestock and our quality of life. In addition the use of chemicals to control them is declining because of changes in legislation and the development of resistance amongst midges. Increasingly more natural methods of protection are being developed such as biological controls for food storage and environmental management.



The biting insects include **mosquitoes**, **midges** and **ticks** which can carry a variety of diseases. Recently some new diseases have entered the UK from mainland Europe including bluetongue in **cattle**. Alison has been involved with a project to estimate the probability of such diseases becoming established in Scotland.

Historically, biting midges have been causing misery for centuries. It is believed that Queen Victoria smoked on her visits to the Highlands to discourage midges.

There are about 48 biting midge species of the genus *Culicoides* in the UK. Around 90% of the bites in Scotland are made by one species, the **Highland midge** *Culicoides impunctatus*. An identification key developed in the 1930s is still used to identify midges. Adults usually fly between May and September, but they can be found at any month of the year. The larvae are found in damp acidic soil, some are associated with *Juncus* species (**rushes**). Midges prefer to bite **cattle**, **sheep** and other large herbivores and normally feed at dawn and dusk, although one species feeds during the day. They can detect CO<sub>2</sub>, heat and movement and they are attracted to dark colours. There is also a chemical attraction to **cows**.

Midge larvae are part of the decomposer food chain helping to recycle organic matter. The larvae have no known predators and there may be two generations a year. Midges are difficult to work on in the laboratory as only four species have bred under lab conditions. Even in the wild, midge larvae are found more rarely than the adults.

Economically, one in five work days in forestry are lost and 60% of tourists may change their holiday plans during the midge season.

Alison's company has developed a midge forecast using a series of monitoring stations across Scotland. Last year it had 70,000 hits on the website. Amongst the events planned using the forecast were weddings and it is thought the forecast has saved several events from cancellation. The latest development of the forecast is an iPhone application. There are a number of developments in helping the livestock industry that investigate the midge lifecycle and try to find ways of disrupting it. Alison is investigating attractants that lure the midges away from the target, repellents using natural ingredients such as **bog myrtle**, and a new repellent using one of the few chemicals still legally available.

David Lampard

## SOCIAL EVENING

22nd February

We once again chose to have a meal at the Station Hotel in Carnoustie which came up to its usual high standard.

A quiz on wild flowers and some bird anagrams were supplied by Liz Olejnik, which caused more trouble than we expected but most people got there in the end. The really difficult quiz was compiled by Anne (what did you expect!) and required us to identify unrelated organisms which share the generic part of their scientific name. As an example, *Prunella vulgaris* is the well-known plant

**self-heal** and *Prunella modularis* is the **dunnock**. All the duplicate names were established before modern naming conventions and this ambiguity would not arise today.

Jim Cook arranged a light-hearted 'award ceremony' when he presented a certificate and a small jar of mustard to Stevie Smith as the "Keenest Naturalist" with a complementary award of "Most Patient Naturalist" to her husband Jim - all taken in very good part by the recipients. The evening finished with a raffle with seemingly endless prizes, so nearly everyone got something to take home.

Anne Reid

## SWT PERTSHIRE RESERVES

Emma Rawling - 26th February

From her original career as a Vet Nurse in Tasmania, followed by a period caring for the animals in a Wildlife Reserve, Emma Rawling retrained in Wildlife Conservation, only to end up halfway round the world, here in Scotland. She has been working for the Scottish Wildlife Trust as a Ranger for the past three years, looking after five Perthshire reserves of very different characters.

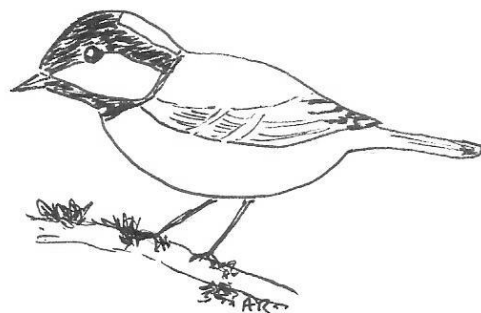
The first of these is Brerachan Meadows, a small traditional Highland hay meadow, bursting with wildflowers in June and July. It was too small to admit a tractor and was never ploughed or improved. This is a great source of seeds and is home to a large and ever-increasing number of plant species.

Then there is Balnaguard Glen, very steep-sided and with remnant **juniper** woodland and great views if you can make it to the top. To manage this habitat, SWT are experimenting with various regimes of conservation grazing (cattle or sheep with different timings) to keep juniper-smothering **bracken** at bay. A good site for **pine marten** and **woodcock** too.

A complete contrast is the Tummel Shingle Islands reserve, with its ever-shifting shingle. This is home to breeding bird colonies, particularly **gulls**, as for much of the year the shingle forms islands which act as a safe haven. This specialised habitat is also home to many butterflies, as well as to alpine plants washed down onto the scree-like shingle of the river. The biggest management problem here is the invasion of **Himalyan balsam**, which would take over the entire reserve if not extensively and repeatedly uprooted (60 hectares cleared last year, by hand).

The fourth reserve is Keltneyburn Meadow and Gorge. The meadow is a superb place to see **orchids** any time between April and August, as there are 9 species on site. There are also plenty of **bluebells** and, in late summer, waist-high **ox-eye daisies** and **knapweed**. Given its profusion of flowers, it is not surprising that it is a great site to see butterflies and also damselflies. Management involves winter conservation grazing as well as fighting **blackthorn**, **ragwort** and **bracken**.

Finally, the star of the show is the Loch of Lowes Reserve and Visitor Centre. Here, Emma is heavily involved in visitor education and access for all - from playgroups through to special interest groups. The famous **ospreys** are ably supported by a cast of **red squirrels**, **waterfowl**, varied woodland **birds**, **pine martens**, **otters** and, more recently, a **beaver**. These can be viewed at the Centre's feeding stations, hides and via webcams. Definitely something for everyone - and the reserve activities can be followed on their blog, twitter feed and YouTube presence.



Emma also told us about this year's satellite tracking of two **ospreys** (one from Angus) on their migration towards Senegal. This combination of researching, managing reserves, managing volunteers and training, surveying/monitoring plants and animals, running public events, and generally spreading the word about the reserves are all part of Emma's role as a Ranger.

A very busy lady with great enthusiasm - and I, for one, am certainly looking forward to visiting all the reserves she showcased in this enjoyable talk.

Janice Coates

## DUNDEE UNIVERSITY BOTANIC GARDEN

9th March

The group was invited to look at the native plant area at the Botanic Garden which has recently been renovated. Clare has been involved in developing the existing area to include a wider range of significantly scarce plants. This work contributes to an international initiative where Botanic Gardens are encouraged to hold long term collections of native plants that are endangered.

The group was able to wander by the semi-natural burn and look for *Sibbaldia procumbens*, **least cinquefoil**, and *Potentilla crantzii*, **alpine cinquefoil**. The gardeners try to maintain a natural look but sometimes this requires drastic maintenance to prevent vigorous weeds taking over!

It was no warmer inside the polytunnel, but the group was able to see examples of the different *Astragalus* species, *A. danicus* and *A. alpinus*, **purple** and **alpine milk-vetch**, respectively, and were informed that the seaside version germinated reliably and grew rapidly while the mountain species germinates slowly and is immediately devoured by **slugs** - presumably slugs do not occur at the high altitudes where this plant usually grows in Scotland.

Those feeling chilly were able to have a warm up in the tropical glasshouse before going for lunch in the nearby coffee shop

Clare Reaney

## SUMMER OUTINGS

### ST ANDREWS BOTANIC GARDEN

13th April

Dundee Naturalists' Society visited the Botanic Garden in St Andrews as an unplanned trip which was not on our usual programme. The visit was organised by Jim Cook to offer support to the Friends of St Andrews Botanic Garden as the future of the Garden was under threat as a result of a proposed 50% cut in funding from Fife Council. The University has expressed willingness for the Garden to continue to exist on its current site, but has stated that a financially sound business plan will need to be approved before the lease will be renewed.

The Friends organised a petition which the 20 Nats members who visited signed. By the closing date of 20th May 2013 **10,977 signatures** had been collected and the petition was presented to representatives of The University of St Andrews and Fife Council



Our visit to the Garden was an interesting one and we were lucky to have good weather in what was turning out to be a very wet spring. We were taken on a tour of the garden by some of the Friends. Notable sightings of the tour were a pair of **magpies** seeking out nesting sites and a **heron** seen gliding along the Kinnessburn. We were lucky to spot some **green-veined white butterflies** and a **small tortoiseshell butterfly**. Highlights of the Garden included the pond and water feature, with **skunk cabbage** just making an appearance, and **primroses, cowslips** and **oxlips** were also in evidence. A **terrapin** was spotted in the pond. The rock scree garden was just beginning to come into its best. Members then explored the variety of habitats in the glasshouses.

The current situation is that although for many years the University has had no academic or strategic use for the Botanic Garden and cannot afford to take on the running costs, they are very sensitive to its importance to a number of people locally so they have granted a rolling lease to the new trust to give them a chance to develop a sustainable plan. Unfortunately the future is not yet secure and the Garden needs to be visited regularly by local people and tourists - it is still very much a case of use it or lose it.

Lorna Ward

## FALKLAND ESTATE

27th April

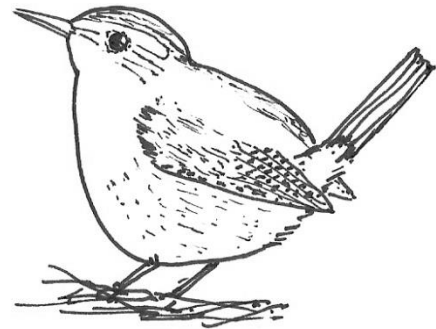
Our progress through the narrow streets of Falkland village was greatly slowed by a large number of cyclists on some kind of road race. When we eventually met up at the Falkland Estate car park we were all ready for our first official walk of the season, and were blessed by bright sunshine.

The route took us up Maspie Den, beside the burn, where the **golden saxifrage**, **celandines** and **primroses** were in full flower. The trees were not yet in leaf so we got the full benefit of the sun's warmth. The place where the path goes behind the waterfall had some well-grown **liverworts** and **mosses** in the humid shade. Just beyond the waterfall a cry went up from Stevie - she had spotted a **bee-fly**, but it flew off before its portrait could be taken, much to everyone's disappointment.

We had lunch at the picnic tables at the upper car park before continuing on a circular route. Unfortunately the path became unclear in a conifer plantation and we temporarily lost our bearings but soon sorted ourselves out by reference to Anne's 1:25,000 map of the area - good old Ordnance Survey!

Once back on track we descended through the forest and diverted sideways to the Pillars of Hercules for a welcome cup of tea and cake. There was a **chaffinch** building a nest in a rather precarious place on top of a light fitting beside the car parking area. It was very obvious and we all wondered whether there would be too much disturbance for the bird to breed successfully.

The flat path back to our starting point took us past the Falkland cricket grounds, both with a match in progress. The **wrens** were singing lustily nearby and were very obvious with few leaves on the trees. Even the lowly **dog's mercury** looked at its best in the sunshine, especially where it was beside **wood anemones** in full flower.



Davie Stein

## DIGHTY EVENING WALK

7th May

The walk explored a part of the Dighty behind Sainsbury's, and next to the industrial estate, not a beautiful area but one with an abundance of wildlife. Many birds were spotted, from a **sparrowhawk** overhead to numerous **swallows** feeding on insects on the surface of the Dighty. We were rewarded with sightings of **sand martins** nesting in the sandy bank on the edge of the burn. Other bird sightings included **swifts**, **house martins**, **crows**, **heron** and a **wren** foraging on the waterside, as well as many other common birds seen in the trees.

Plant life was well represented with, sadly, an abundance of the invasive **giant hogweed**, **Himalayan balsam** and **Japanese knotweed**. However this did not detract from the **meadowsweet** just coming into flower, **meadow cranesbill**, **campion** and **comfrey**.

Although our evening was a snapshot of one visit it is a constantly changing environment. I have seen **deer** and a **fox** in this area as well and, during the summer months, an abundance of **northern marsh orchids**. It is a very important corridor for wildlife on the edge of our city.

Lorna Ward

## BARON'S HAUGH AND CHATELHERAULT COUNTRY PARK

11th May

A fair number of enthusiastic Nats turned out to travel to Lanarkshire to visit Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve at Motherwell en route to our main venue, Chatelherault Country Park at Hamilton.

Historically, Baron's Haugh was the hunting estate of the Dalzell family, but following further changes in ownership over the years, these wetlands and woodlands are presently owned by the RSPB, who purchased them in 1983. The reserve is grazed by cattle now to maintain the short

grassland needed by nesting waders. Straightaway on exiting the bus, it was noticed with delight that there were **primroses**, **cowslips** and also their hybrids, **false oxlips**, growing side by side right on the bank.

The reserve promised much, having two trails and four hides, but since it was a brief stop, we had only time to make the most of two of the hides. The weather was less than favourable, but it didn't put a damper on our spirits. At the time of writing, Baron's Haugh is known for being the most northerly breeding location for **nuthatches**, but most of us were not privileged to have a sighting on this occasion.



Brian Williamson stopped to admire a specimen of the delicate pale pink **lady's smock** and discovered that it had a slightly damp **orange tip butterfly** clinging to it, with wings shut tight, though we were still able to see the orange markings within, which distinguished it as a male.

Then on to Chatelherault, home of the ancient **Cadzow oaks**, where the group split according to ability, with eight hardy souls taking the five mile circular walk past the oaks, some of which are over 600 years old, and the remainder either walking a shorter trail with Anne Reid or taking advantage of the Heritage exhibition with its wealth of information in the visitor centre.

The weather remained damp, but improved and the long walkers, though setting a steady pace, kept their eyes open and before long spotted some brightly coloured late specimens of the fungus, **scarlet elf cups**. Unfortunately these were growing on wood at the bottom of a virtually inaccessible deep bank - inaccessible to most of us apart from one intrepid member, who, as sure footed as a mountain goat, climbed down to take photos. It wasn't long before we spotted further fungi, the aptly named **jelly ears** and a bit of judicious log turning (and replacing!) revealed some beautiful short-lived **myxomycetes**, fascinating **slime moulds**. Due to the inclement weather, the smaller birds appeared to be keeping a low profile, but we did hear **ravens** and **jays**.

Eagle eyed as ever, Jim Cook spotted some earthworks a short way off the path and a bit of investigation showed these to be a **badger sett**, so some time was spent admiring the extent of the tunnelling before returning to the bus, back over the scenic Duke's Bridge with the River Avon Gorge 80 feet below.

Stevie Smith

The shorter walk did involve a slight detour to look at the **Cadzow oaks**, but mainly kept close to the edges of the woodland. The late season meant that we saw **bluebells**, **wood sorrel**, **ramsons**, **dog's mercury** and **crosswort** all in flower. Despite the rain the birds were singing and we heard **chiffchaff**, **willow warbler** and **blackcap** along with **song thrush**, **blackbird** and **robin**. Our walk took us to the pillared splendour of the Duke's Monument, also high above the Avon Gorge, further downstream.

Anne Reid

## **BAMFF ESTATE, ALYTH - BEAVERS**

14th May

There was a good turnout for this evening excursion, a follow-up to the lecture on **beavers** that Paul Ramsay had given to the Society the previous October. It had even been advertised by the Société Française pour l'Étude et la Protection des Mammifères (French Mammal Society) and an organisation in northern France called Eaux Vivante as part of a pan-European network of events 'Le Printemps des Castors' (Beaver Spring), although no European visitors came along. We were fortunate to have a fine dry evening, after some torrential showers earlier.

After telling us the history of beaver reintroduction at Bamff since 2002, Paul Ramsay led us around parts of the estate where beavers had been active, so we were able to see the results of their

work, and also some of the mitigation measures that can be used where there is a risk of beavers causing a nuisance. For example, polythene drainage pipes through a beaver dam can prevent the water level rising too high - but beavers are adept at spotting leaks, so the inlet and outlet need to be clear of the dam itself, and the inlet shielded by a wire cage as a further precaution against the beavers plugging it. Valued trees can be protected with rabbit wire - left unprotected, even several very large old **beech** trees had been felled, as had, somewhat surprisingly, some conifers. One of the few plants that beavers appear not to eat, unfortunately, is the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum*. A steep-sided drainage channel was already showing healthy signs of rebraiding, thanks to the beavers' efforts. We also saw one of the live-traps being used as part of the monitoring of free-living beavers in the Tay Catchment by the Tayside Beaver Study Group.

After an hour or so, it was time for the animals themselves to emerge, so we moved to a viewpoint in one of the large enclosures. The first **beaver** was spotted almost immediately, and one or more animals remained in sight for the whole remainder of our visit. No-one is sure how many beavers are now living at Bamff, but we saw a minimum of three, probably more, individuals. Towards the end of our visit, we had a vision of a past and perhaps future landscape, as a **beaver** grazed the waterside vegetation, while half-a-dozen **wild boar** foraged in the woodland behind it. As we left, a single **bat**, probably a **pipistrelle**, was flitting past the trees.

As Anne Reid said in her vote of thanks, the excursion must have been unique in the history of the Nats, in that the 24 members present remained virtually silent for more than an hour!

You can read more about the Bamff Estate beavers on the website [www.bamff.co.uk/beavers.html](http://www.bamff.co.uk/beavers.html).

Colin McLeod

## ARBROATH CLIFFS

21st May

An enthusiastic group of 18 keen members and friends met at the end of the esplanade next to Whiting Ness and were soon wending along the cliff-side path. We were pleased to welcome Adam Ritchie, a former Society President and member of long standing. He had left the area after retiring from Dundee Museum. It was a lovely evening, dull but not windy, good conditions to find wildlife of all kinds on the cliffs. The late season meant that early spring plants were still in flower - **thrift** and **scurvy-grass** with masses of **primroses** in Dickmont's Den - and **sea campion**, **hogweed**, **red campion** and other summer species were just coming into flower. Scattered tufts of the blue-green leaves of the maritime variety of **red fescue** poked among the vegetation and clumps of **gorse** were in full yellow bloom. However, bare blackened patches showed the unfortunate effects of unthinking destruction of the **gorse**. What, in turn, would be the effects on nesting birds and on soil erosion? The usual groups of breeding **herring gulls** were raucous below, **cormorants** spread their wings on the rocks just above the sea and a sprinkling of **fulmar** pairs dotted the cliffs.

Further on, opposite the Deil's Heid, we found the characteristic holes of **mining bees** beside the path but no flying specimens were in evidence, perhaps due to the lack of a warm sun. A short distance along the path, the group crossed over to examine the small area of remaining **maritime heath**. The ground was dry and the effects of the late season much in evidence. No **northern marsh orchids** could be found, only one or two green leaf tips, although there were a number of last year's heads in among the **heathers**. Some **rushes** and a few common **sedge** plants were showing. A careful search along the steep banks below yielded only three heads of **early purple orchids** (*Orchis mascula*) in their usual locality. Possibly more might appear later. Last year's heads of **carline thistle** (*Carlina vulgaris*) dotted the grass and we found a number of green shoots of this year's plants. It had been a most interesting and informative evening.



Jim Cook

## WHITBY WEEKEND

24th - 27th May

This foray south of the border was to an area unknown to many of us which resulted in a lot of interest and a total of 37 participants. The distance involved dictated an early start so the bus left Dundee at 8.00am with the promise of a cup of coffee (or second breakfast?) at Dobbies, Dunfermline just after nine. Though bright and sunny, there was a strong, cold wind blowing which restricted wildlife sightings around the car park to **crow**, **herring gull**, **starling** and **greenfinch** with single queens of **buff-tailed** and **red-tailed bumblebees** also seen fleetingly on the flowering **heathers**.

Our next stop was at Tynemouth where everyone scattered to do their own thing. Many patronised one of the numerous local cafes but a significant number also visited the ruined Priory and watched the **gulls**, **fulmars** and **kittiwakes** soaring beside the cliffs over a very stormy sea. Because of the wind the pier was closed due to the large waves breaking over it, but several people explored the small beach nearby. Anne's daughter, Christine, met us here as she lives in Newcastle and had requested some items from home!

We then headed south through the Tyne Tunnel and on towards Whitby. Our route took us over the North York Moors and then David suggested that we approach along the coast from the north. This involved the very steep descent down Lythe Bank to Sandsend which gave us a wonderful view all the way down to Whitby and also an immediate prospect of large waves breaking at the shore as it was high tide. Charlie, our driver, decided that he wanted photographs so found somewhere to stop the bus and a number of people tumbled out (one literally!) with cameras in hand. Several of the photographers returned to the bus somewhat damp having been caught by the substantial spray from the waves. A short time later we arrived at the Royal Hotel in Whitby, situated above the harbour and opposite the Abbey.

Saturday morning dawned bright and sunny and, thankfully, the wind had dropped - uncharacteristically good weather for a Bank Holiday weekend. Our first destination was Dalby Forest, near Pickering, where we planned a walk to the Bridestones. Though the forest is managed by the Forestry Commission, the area of land around the Bridestones belongs to the National Trust and the stones themselves are remnant pillars of Jurassic limestone on the moorland. Ronnie, Jim Cook and Anne were all seen to climb the easier pillars while everyone else contented themselves with admiring them from ground level. A **tree pipit** was heard singing lustily in a small **birch** at the edge of the wood and **chiffchaff**, **willow warbler**, **blackcap** and **whitethroat** were also in full spring song. It was sunny enough for **butterflies** with **peacock**, **green-veined white** and **small white** all being seen. A **bee-fly** and a **tiger beetle** were also spotted, fleetingly.



The plants were all looking freshly in flower with a particularly fine show of **blackthorn** blossom along a hedgerow. The small orange bells of **blaeberry** were inconspicuous but a sign of late summer fruit potential. Jim Smith moved quietly away from the paths and saw several **common lizards**, a **slow worm** and got a glimpse of what was probably an **adder**.

Those who preferred a shorter walk circumnavigated the small Staindale Lake nearby and all enjoyed the sunshine. The appearance of an ice cream van at our meeting place got hopes up but he was merely stopping to put out a sign saying - tantalisingly - that his wares were available in the car park half a mile away. Unfortunately, by this stage there was not time for the detour, so we stopped at the main Visitor Centre on our way out of the forest

area and many managed to buy refreshments for themselves.

Since much of our weekend was in or near the North York Moors National Park, it seemed appropriate to visit an area of moorland. There is a relatively new Hawk and Owl Trust reserve at Jagger Howe a few miles south of Whitby and this was where we stopped next. Due to the late spring there were few of the expected moorland birds present but the moor itself was very pleasant in the warm sunshine. A **curlew** was heard and **swallows** and **skylarks** flew overhead. Many watched a **kestrel** hunting towards the northern edge of the moorland. There were a few plants coming into

flower beside the track, including **birds foot trefoil**, **milkwort**, **tormentil** and **lousewort**. Some folk just took a short walk from the bus while others completed a circular path on the relatively flat moorland. A few ventured down to the beck beyond the circular walk, down a very well-made path which most closely resembled a staircase! There were signs of more interesting plants to come but everything had been slow to start growing. This part of the reserve is apparently very good for **butterflies**, and other insect life, later in the season - a reason to revisit in the summer, perhaps. We had to content ourselves with the photographic opportunity of a pair of mating **green tiger beetles**, much less flighty than singles we had seen elsewhere.

Though a visit to Whitby Abbey was not originally planned, it was arranged to drop off all those interested on the way past into Whitby, on the understanding that we would walk back across the town to the Hotel. After a most interesting exploration there was the added bonus of seeing the historic swing bridge opened to allow a boat through to the inner harbour - it held us up but nobody minded.

After dinner a small party walked across to the beach on the south side of the harbour to look for fossils before the light faded too far.



**Ammonite**

Sunday morning dawned bright and sunny again and we made the short journey to Robin Hood's Bay. The town itself is very steep and all parking is in the old station yard at the top of the cliff. The Cleveland Way path along the clifftop was recommended for those who balked at the idea of climbing back up to the bus at the end of the morning. Most others walked down to the shore with fossil hunting in mind. This part of the Yorkshire coast is renowned for its **belemnite**, **crinoid**, **ammonite** and **bivalve fossils** and, with the tide fully out, the whole shore was available to us. After a warning to keep well away from the unstable cliffs (we could hear bits falling off!) the beach soon witnessed a scatter of Nats. A range of bivalve fossils, including **devil's toenail**, was found and **ammonites** occurred in three forms - imprints, crystalline replacements and pyritised. The latter were very small and still embedded in the rock but the golden colour of the **iron pyrites** shone out and attracted our attention.



**Devil's Toenail**

At the end of the morning many of the shore party elected to walk along the coast the three miles to our afternoon destination of Ravenscar. Everyone else reassembled on the bus but we found that two of our party had got lost. A helpful cyclist reported to Charlie that he had seen the two in question getting into a car to be taken back to the bus. After waiting a while Anne received a phone call confirming this and two very kind members of the public brought our wanderers back to the fold, much to everyone's relief.

Ravenscar was a delight, with habitats ranging from **gorse** scrub to unimproved meadow via **bluebell** wood and pond. Everyone found a part of the walk to suit their abilities and many reached the ruins of the Alum Works near the clifftop. **Alum shale** was mined from the hillside and the cliffs themselves, changing the landscape. With imported **seaweed** and stale urine (for ammonia) the shale was converted into **alum**, by a long and complicated process. **Alum** was used in the dyeing and leather tanning industries and the industry was very lucrative until chemists learned how to make alum in the lab in the 1860s. The boards amongst the ruins described how this had been a major industrial site with many processing and residential buildings and a cliff railway to enable loading and unloading of cargoes as close as possible to the works.

We paused for a while at the pond and spotted a newly-emerged **large red damselfly** resting on the vegetation and numerous **tadpoles** in the water. Closer examination revealed several **newts** in the water, remarkably well camouflaged amongst the dead stems and floating leaves. There were also **water boatmen**, **pond skaters** and **whirligig beetles** visible and doubtless a great deal more underwater out of sight and reach.

In the wetter places the **lady's smock** was in flower and two **orange tip butterflies** were seen nearby. The woods held **bluebells**, **greater stitchwort**, **celandines**, **wood sorrel** and **violets** and a **dor beetle** was found crawling across the path. Unfortunately the unimproved meadow near the alum works was not yet in flower, due to the late season, but Anne spotted a **speckled wood butterfly** near the cliff edge and there were **whitethroats**, **blackcaps** and **willow warblers** seemingly singing from every patch of scrub or **gorse**.

Some walked the old railway path along to the disused brick works which had been set up when Ravenscar was planned as a new coastal resort at the end of the 19th Century. Part of the path was made up with surplus bricks, stamped 'Ravenscar', which were never used for building when the



grand plan came to nothing - the 'Town That Never Was'. Once back at the National Trust Visitor Centre we had time for refreshments before returning to Whitby.

On Monday morning we departed, still in bright sunshine, towards Middlesbrough. **Peewits** were displaying over the moors and there were **greylag geese** with **goslings** on Scaling Dam Reservoir - amazing what you can see from a bus! Our destination was Saltholm RSPB reserve near Billingham. This has a variety of shallow pools with hides and a very wide range of birds was seen ranging from the small birds at the feeders to **shelduck**, **pochard** and **gadwall**. Pat Gaff got a glimpse of a **reed warbler** and a **little ringed plover** was visible in the distance on one of the shallower, muddier pools. We all enjoyed the brand new Visitor Centre and its facilities and were given the bonus of observing, from indoors, the local **fox** ON the bird table clearing up all the seed intended for feathered visitors.



Our final stop was at Berwick-upon-Tweed where Anne led a small group down the hill and along the river bank. All the spring flowers were just starting to open and there was plenty to see. The railway bridge is particularly imposing from river level and the ruins of Berwick Castle are nearby. Others explored the town or walked the walls and most managed to fit in a cup of tea before we headed for home, arriving back in Dundee in the early evening.

Anne Reid

## ABERLADY BAY

1st June

Our trip to Aberlady was blessed by fine sunny weather. The Local Nature Reserve offered a longer circular walk via Gullane and this was led by Anne Reid. The rest of us covered the main reserve area mainly keeping to the large and small paths which crisscross the largely flat terrain. A number of birds were spotted including **stonechat**, **skylark** and a number of water birds in the small lochs, and on the shore itself. To everyone's delight we were fortunate to see a fair number of **orange tip butterflies** which were on the wing despite the brisk wind.

On the plant side of things we saw a couple of orchids, *Dactylorhiza purpurella*, the **northern marsh orchid**, and the much rarer *Dactylorhiza incarnata* ssp. *coccinea*, the **dune early marsh orchid**. **Bogbean** was in flower and was much admired by the Nats.

From the dunes the rusting hulks of two wartime miniature submarines could be observed and several members went across the sand to inspect them at close quarters.

On our way back we found an area of flat dune that appeared to have been managed by mowing, presumably as an alternative to grazing. Here we found a number of *Neottia ovata*, the **common twayblade** just beginning to flower along with **butterwort**, *Pinguicula vulgaris* and other low growing species which obviously like this short turfed area. By the roadside, as we headed for our coach, there was a wonderful display of *Ornithogalum umbellatum*, the **common star of Bethlehem**.

To round off the trip we had arranged a brief stop at the Scottish Ornithologists' Club headquarters at Waterston House at Aberlady where we were able to have a cup of tea and to admire the artwork in the gallery.

Brian and Jenny Allan

## ELLIOT

11th June

I arrived at the car park in driving light rain to find no other cars - which confirmed my fears that this would not be a particularly well-attended evening outing. Happily, we actually had eleven by the time we started, including two potential new recruits from Arbroath who had been persuaded to come along by Stevie. A unanimous decision was made to walk up the Elliot Water along the old railway footpath instead of braving the open dunes. The dunes are wonderful when the sun shines, as it had on the previous Friday recce, but rather exposed in driving rain!

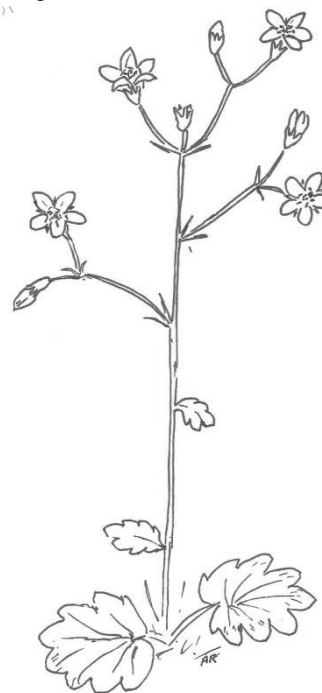
Not far along the path we came upon a particularly good example of a hybrid between **herb bennet** and **water avens** showing fully intermediate characteristics. Though there was **herb bennet** nearby we didn't find any **water avens** all evening though there were various other hybrids. Further up the path Anne and Stevie spent a long time photographing a **brown-lipped snail** on a **dandelion** seedhead - obviously not ripe enough to shed the seeds despite the weight of the snail - a most unusual sight.

Where the path goes into the field there was a good group of **meadow saxifrage** in flower - the best specimens being just through the fence away from the grazing cattle. We encountered the beasts in the next section of field and, though they were quite lively and curious, they caused us no problems despite having the **bull** with them.

On the final section of wooded path there was a very noisy family of **great spotted woodpeckers** heard, but not seen. This was possibly parents calling to newly fledged chicks but, despite waiting around for a long time they didn't show themselves. Though it had stopped raining by now we decided not to go as far as Arbirlot and leave that for another day.

Back at the car park Jim pointed out the shrubby **Duke of Argyll's tea tree** (*Lycium barbatum*) at the roadside where it has been known for a number of years. There were even a few of its small purple flowers open. Not a plant which many had seen before - even the gardeners amongst us!

Anne Reid



## SANDS OF FORVIE NNR, NEWBURGH

15th June

Forvie is a wonderful place, and especially so when the sun shines. We were lucky to have good weather which helped us to appreciate the wide diversity of habitats and species seen on the day.

On arrival everybody set out along the path alongside the River Ythan estuary. The tide was out and there were some distant **elder** and **oystercatchers** to be seen. Many stopped to admire the plants in the small areas of **saltmarsh** vegetation at the top of the shore. **Sea milkwort** (*Glaux maritima*) was just in flower but needed a close look to appreciate its tiny pink flowers and there was a little **thrift** in flower nearby. Brian Ballinger and David Lampard wandered down across the shore to see if they could find anything of interest but everyone else stuck to the path. A pair of **stonechats** seemed very agitated in the **gorse** bushes nearby though we could see no obvious threat other than ourselves - perhaps they had newly-fledged young nearby. We came across the first of many **garden tiger moth** caterpillars crossing the path and the **heartsease pansies** (*Viola tricolor*) provided bright spots of colour in the short grassland.

The heathery area fenced off for breeding **elder** yielded a single **common heath moth** but the Rangers reported that **elder** nests were in short supply this year, possibly due to predation. Rather surprisingly one of the culprits was a **badger**. If it had not been recorded nest-raiding by a remote camera, nobody would have known the truth. Badgers raiding nests on sand dunes is not something any of us had heard of before, and neither had the Rangers!

Those bringing up the rear started to find small parties of Nats scattered amongst the dunes intent on eating lunch. After refuelling some walked back to the bus before it departed for the Visitor Centre while the rest of us walked through the dunes to the shore and then via the ruined church and Hackley Bay eventually to meet up at the appointed time.

The sandy part of the path, which was hard going, runs alongside a large fenced-off area devoted to the protection of the nesting **terns**, of four species - **common**, **arctic**, **sandwich** and **little**. A few **sandwich terns** were seen fishing offshore but the nest sites are at the far end of the restricted



area so few others were seen. In the loose sand of the dune area there were large patches of **bird's foot trefoil** and a small amount of searching revealed caterpillars and pupae of the **six-spot burnet moth**.

Once on the beach itself someone found a displaced **tiger moth** caterpillar being blown across the sand by the stiff breeze. This was duly rescued and put back amongst the dune grasses. Along the water's edge there were a couple of **sanderling** scuttling along ahead of us. Obviously non-breeders, but rather a surprise to those who normally consider them to be winter visitors.

The path through the dune heath towards Hackley Bay had a number of surprises. A small wet area held **marsh lousewort** (*Pedicularis palustris*) and **butterwort** (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), and **milkwort** (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) was just coming into flower. There were historic reports of **oyster plant** (*Mertensia maritima*) on the shore at or near Hackley Bay, so several people searched, unsuccessfully, for this

transient strandline plant. However, the cliffs had nesting **fulmars** and **house martins** and a colony of nesting **cormorants** was spotted on offshore rocks just to the north of the bay showing their feather patterns wonderfully in the sunlight.

As we neared the end of the walk we started to meet those who had gone ahead on the bus and some stopped for a breather at the table beside Sand Loch. A pair of **reed buntings** was busily coming and going near a low **willow** at the loch side, feeding a nest full of youngsters we presumed. By this time, unfortunately, the sun had gone and the breeze struck chill, so no **dragonflies** were seen. A **snipe** was flushed nearby and a couple of **mallard** cruised on the water.

At the appointed time we all gathered at the small Visitor Centre and whiled away any spare time by deciding on what to order from the Stonehaven chip shop on the way home. The order was duly phoned ahead before our departure and, slightly to Anne's surprise (and relief!), everybody seemed to get the right thing when the multiple bags were distributed on the bus. Jolly good chips they were too, a satisfying end to an excellent day.

Anne Reid

## BALGAVIES LOCH SWT RESERVE

25th June

A good turnout of Nats met for a very pleasant evening exploring the delights that this reserve has to offer. Even before everyone had assembled, the male **osprey** was spotted high in a tree with a very large **trout** grasped firmly in his talons. Hence first stop was the hide where there were good views to be had of the **osprey** nest, which had three chicks present, attended by both parents. These would go on to be ringed at a later date. Also seen from the hide, on the opposite bank was a **heron's** nest with well grown and lively, demanding chicks.

The group split depending on interests and also ability, there being many high stiles to negotiate on the circular walk round the loch. Some remained at the hide to further enjoy the **ospreys** and **heron**, some walked as far as the first stile and the remainder completed the circuit. Pretty **common blue damselflies**, which had appeared earlier in the week on the recce, showed themselves, which were delightful to see. Further round on the opposite bank, **blue-tailed damselflies** were also present, one of which became a tasty meal for a **warbler** - one of the 32 bird species seen and noted.

A wide variety of plants were spotted and noted, including **meadow vetchling** and the water-loving plants **water bistort**, **loosestrife** and **yellow flag iris**. **Meadowsweet** had splashes of colourful **rust fungus** apparent. Trees included several **mirabelle plums**, also called **cherry plums**, though this year they appeared not to be cropping well at all. **Oak** leaves and shoots were festooned with many **oak currant galls**, the product of egg laying by tiny **wasps**. Two **brown hares** were seen in the field on the opposite side of the road from one of the reserve's higher points.

Down at the waterside, *Gammarus*, **fresh water shrimps** were seen, also **water snails** and a **flatworm**. The **greylag geese** were counted and at approximately 260, were noted to be more abundant than the previous year. A rather stunning **harvestman** appeared on top of a fencepost - *Megabunus diadema*, with its double row of head spikes resembling a tiny crown. Obliging it remained still for a photograph with an attractive backdrop of the **yellow iris** behind to complement it. A **treecreeper** was spotted near the end of the walk and just off the path, the returning stragglers enjoyed the sight of a large developing fungus, the edible **chicken of the woods**, beautiful and fresh, in shades of yellow and peach.

After noting that the **osprey** family were settling down for the night, the final sighting for the evening was a common **black slug**, *Arion ater*, entertaining us by abseiling down on silken slime from a fence post. Sometimes it's the simplest things that are so fascinating. All in all, a very enjoyable evening with fine weather and much of interest.

Stevie Smith

## QUEEN ELIZABETH FOREST PARK

29th June

Queen Elizabeth Forest Park was first designated as a Forest Park by the Forestry Commission in 1953 to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and covers an area from the east shore of Loch Lomond to the rugged terrain of Strathyre. The Forest Park encompasses mountain and moorland, forest and woodland, rivers and lochs and is home to a rich variety of animal and plant life. Our day was based around the David Marshall Lodge, which at the time was in the process of being renovated with only a small replacement centre open.

There were several walks available with a short walk to the waterfall with plenty of wildflowers along the way. A very attractive double-flowered **bramble** (below) was seen beside the track and three spikes of **heath spotted orchid** brightened up a shady path edge. On reaching the waterfall some members rested in the hammocks but not for long as there were plenty of **midges** in evidence.

A further break for members was in the Squirrel Hide where several **red squirrels** were sighted as well as **great spotted woodpecker** and a **jay**, and a selection of the more common woodland birds.

The more intrepid members completed a higher level walk to the Highland Boundary Fault line, the major fault which crosses Scotland from Arran on the west coast to Stonehaven in the east. It separates the Highlands from the Lowlands, and in most places it is recognisable as a change in the landscape. Despite what appeared to be a clear description of the location of the fault on our walk, it was not as immediately obvious as in other parts of Scotland, perhaps due to being masked by trees.

Back in the temporary Visitor Centre there was a webcam observing a nearby **osprey** nest and some members caused excitement when they spotted a **grey squirrel** trying to invade the nest. The intruder was seen off by the parent bird but the Rangers were most interested as they were unaware of grey squirrels in the immediate area of the nest.



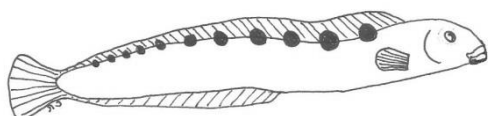
Lorna Ward

Near the Visitor Centre there was a very attractive, relatively new statue erected as a memorial to all the women who served in the Timber Corps in Scotland in the War. Ed.

## EASTHAVEN - ROCKPOOLING

9th July

Although the day had been pleasant enough, the evening breeze made our rockpooling session at Easthaven on the chilly side. A fair turnout of hardy Nats followed the receding ebb tide, some harder than others, armed with an assortment of nets and receptacles. Various methods were employed to seek out an assortment of specimens, from pretty golden-coloured **anemones**, **starfish**, **chitons**, **worms** and **crabs** - both **shore** and **edible**, which were mainly found closer to shore, to **shrimps**, **blennies**, **butterfish** and **sea urchins** which favoured the slightly deeper midshore pools further out to sea.



Turning over flat rocks within the pools yielded much of interest and these stones were carefully returned to their former position to preserve the habitat of the rockpool inhabitants. Gradually, the chill caused the party to commence breaking up earlier than anticipated, but everyone

appeared to have enjoyed the evening experience. Several diehards persisted searching, but eventually most of us were only too pleased to head home to thaw out!

Stevie Smith

It must be noted that near the end of the evening, Stevie was to be found in a rockpool up to her ankles wearing her 'paddling trainers'. To increase her exposure to cold water she also had both hands and her (waterproof) camera in the pool taking a 'natural' shot of a **sea urchin** - no wonder that she needed to go home to thaw out!

Anne Reid

## FLANDERS MOSS AND THE WHANGIE

20th July

The weather promised to be hot and dry but the bus was rather sparsely populated, with a small turnout of 21 members. After a brief coffee break at Dobbies, Stirling, we continued on to Flanders Moss. Fortunately the coach met no other vehicles on the narrow track in to the Moss and the small car park was empty. The information boards attracted some attention and then most members climbed up the tower to gain a wonderful view over the site, with its slightly curved surface, but the numerous lines of the old drainage ditches were only too obvious. Also immediately obvious was the general lack of water, compared to last year, with the previous three weeks of warm and dry weather. The surface mosses in most places were dry but there was still plenty of wildlife in evidence. From the tower the well-made path and boardwalk could be seen to stretch in a wide arc over the moss.

Much of the surface was being invaded by **birch** trees but the efforts to clear the site were obvious, with large numbers of cut stumps visible across the surface. The usual bog plants were much in evidence, including **cross-leaved heath** (*Erica tetralix*), **purple moor grass** (*Molinia caerulea*), tough clumps of **moor grass** (*Nardus stricta*), dense tufts of **deer grass** (*Trichophorum caespitosum*), but surprisingly few shoots of **bog asphodel** (*Narthecium ossifragum*), none of which were in flower. **Soft rush** (*Juncus effusus*) and **heath rush** (*J. squarrosus*) were much seen and, in the damp areas, masses of white tufts marked the heads of **common cottongrass** (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) but only a few tufts of **hare's-tail cottongrass** (*E. vaginatum*) could be seen. In fact, the air was blowing with the **cottongrass** seeds and the few remaining small **birch** trees were decorated with an abundance of the white fibres.

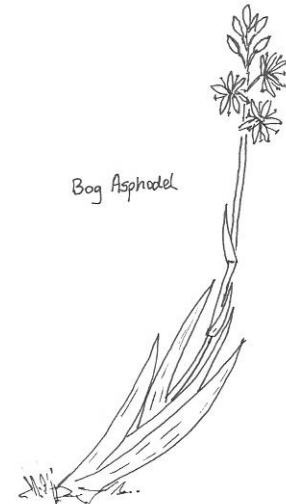
A number of members were intrigued to find numbers of **round-leaved sundew** plants (*Drosera rotundifolia*) carrying flower spikes with wide open flowers (which is a rather rare occurrence!) in the first wet patch. In a few places numbers of the small, still-green fruits of **cranberry** (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) were lying on the dry bog surface. Only a few **small heath butterflies** were in evidence and one or two small moths but Alban was first to pick out a **blue-tailed damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*). A short while later Liz spotted an **emerald damselfly** (*Lestes sponsa*) and a **common hawker dragonfly** (*Sympetrum striolatum*) was seen over one of the small pools.

The only disappointment, as Brian Williamson noted, was the scarcity of birds, with no raptors at all, only a few **gulls** and **carriion crows**.

John the bus driver warned us that earlier in the week the road past the Whangie car park had been closed. We could only keep our fingers crossed and trust to luck. In the event, the road was open and the car park for The Whangie and Queen's View wasn't too busy, with plenty of room for our bus. Just over the wall was a small boggy area but drifts of the very bright yellow flowers of abundant **bog asphodel** on the slightly higher ground caught the eye.

**Ragged robin** (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) flowers and **marsh lousewort** (*Pedicularis palustris*) plants were scattered across the wet ground among the stands of rushes and sedges while a few **northern marsh orchids** and **heath spotted orchids** could be seen among the other bog plants. On the slopes around the hill above were lines of ditches and mounds for tree planting but most were too far away to see if they had been planted with conifers. The nearest ones, though, seemed to be bare of small trees. Most members made their way up to the Queen's View on the side of the hill and many continued on to the distant hilltop and The Whangie itself.

The trail round the hillside provided excellent views over the Campsies and north to Loch Lomond, with the distinctive shape of Ben Lomond and the blue peaks of the Argyll hills in the distance. **Heather** (*Calluna vulgaris*) was just coming into flower and **bell heather** (*Erica cinerea*) and **wild thyme** (*Thymus polytrichus*) perfumed the warm air. Barbara Tulloch attracted the admiration of all by ploughing on regardless and reached The Whangie before most of us. The path was rather rough in places and it took most about three-quarters of an hour in the heat to cover the mile and a quarter, but it was worth it to have close-up look at this most striking geological feature. A great split in the rock face had opened up (at the end of the last ice-age, it is thought) just far enough to admit a narrow path and Gordon and several other members spent time matching the formations on either side of the crack. A variety of shade plants including lichens, ferns and mosses, **wood sorrel** (*Oxalis acetosella*) and grasses sheltered in the depths of the split. While cooling down, several of us watched a couple of groups of climbers practising their expertise on the sheer walls of both the inside and outside of the feature. Back at the bus, by public acclaim, we asked for a short stop in Drymen for a very well-deserved cold drink or ice-cream. We caused a brief traffic hold-up, but were soon on our way back to Dundee.



Jim Cook

## NORTH FIFE LOWLAND HEATHS

13th August

This visit was to look at lowland heath habitat, a rare type of landscape as much of it has disappeared under farmland. The hills of North Fife being on old **basalt** rocks have proved resistant to agriculture: these hills are a continuation of the Ochils but only 250ft high. In Angus the only remaining protected piece of lowland heath is at Rossie Moor which is known for **petty whin** and **butterfly orchids**.

It was a large group and a fine evening so we meandered slowly up the slope. Thanks to the landowner, who is very proactive about managing the site (with advice from SNH), the heathland is managed by low numbers of grazing cows, in this case female **Highland cattle** with calves. Fortunately all the livestock we met were friendly. The cattle have a reputation for eating even prickly **gorse**, which is one of the main invasive species. Though there are no plants of rarity on Norman's Law it is the dense carpet of **bell heather** and **blaeberry**, together with some lovely **lichen**, which make the site special. However, on nearby Loch Hill, also with SSSI designation, where there is no management, the slopes of the hill are being swamped by **bracken**, **willowherb** and **gorse**. Only the small flat summit of Loch Hill has an unusual tundra-like feel with the mosses, lichen and low growing vegetation. Nearby Glenduckie Hill is also worth looking at as being part of the SSSI.

It was interesting to see from old maps (provided by Colin McLeod) that much of the hill was forested in the 1800s. Certainly in the spring you may find **wood anemone** and **bluebells** on the north slope of the Law.

The finale of the evening was reaching the top, with glorious views up the Tay towards Perth, a bit of late sun highlighting the distant hills.

Thank you to Sandy Edwards (Fife Botanical Recorder) for his local knowledge.

Clare Reaney

## BARRY BUDDON

18th August

Over 60 members of the five local groups (Dundee Nats, SWT, RSPB, SOC and ADBC) turned out to enjoy the natural history treasures of Barry Buddon. They were welcomed initially by Camp Commandant Captain Dave McGurk who gave an interesting summary on the past history of Barry Buddon and made mention of the great need to be aware of the importance of Health and Safety while on the estate. Bob and Jim then addressed the group members giving them a warm welcome with some enjoying their first visit.



The birdwatchers then made their way onto the reserve led by Bob and Graham and during the course of the day 59 bird species were recorded along with 12 butterflies. Bird highlights featured four birds of prey; **peregrine**, **sparrowhawk**, **merlin** and **buzzard**; plus passage migrants; **cuckoo**, **whinchat**, **wheatear** and **blackcap**. Our coastline coverage added eight species of waders to the list, plus **arctic skua**, **great skua** and **gannet**. All these contributed to another successful birding day.

The overnight moth trapping, carried out at the High Lighthouse, was again successful with 21 species being recorded despite the very windy conditions. The botanists, as usual, enjoyed their day with the largest number of **adder's tongue fern** ever recorded on our Open Days. We also looked for, and found, the beautiful **grass of Parnassus**, which happens to be my personal favourite, and were delighted to see the return of the lovely **betony** on Spion Kop Road after an absence of a few years.

The highlight of the day's butterfly records was kept to the end of the day when Keith and Graham looked for, and found, the very rare **purple hairstreak butterfly** in the **oak** woods. It was actually photographed by Barry and Ruth Forbes - well done! This wonderful end to our day ensured we all went home very satisfied with another enjoyable Open Nature Day with Barry Buddon once again coming up trumps with welcome surprises.

Bob McCurley

## PHOTOGRAPHS



The summit party on Norman's Law on the evening of August 13th.

Article on page 21.

(Photograph by Anne Reid)



**'Bracken Buck' by Jim Smith**  
The winning entry in the 2013 Photographic Competition for the Kim Eberst Trophy



**Keen of Hamar, Shetland, and its special plants. (Photograph by Brian Allan)**  
From left: Spring squill (*Scilla verna*), Norwegian sandwort (*Arenaria norvegica*), Edmonston's chickweed (*Cerastium nigrescens*), Frog orchid (*Dactylorhiza viridis*) and Northern rock cress (*Draba norvegica*). Article on page 40.



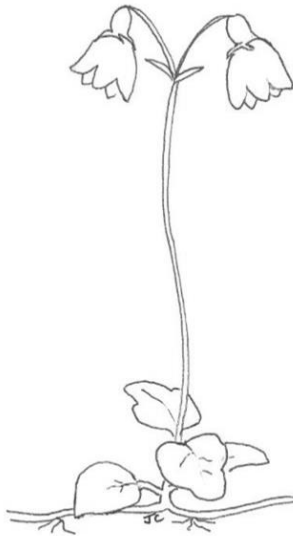
## SUMMER OUTINGS (CONTINUED)

### GLEN TANAR

24th August

Glen Tanar is a privately owned estate which falls within the Cairngorms National Park and is managed both as a traditional sporting estate and a conservation area. The estate is situated between Aboyne and Ballater and includes the Munro Mount Keen (939m) and a good stretch of the River Dee. While there is **salmon** fishing, **trout** fishing on the loch and **deer** stalking, there is also a commitment to conserve the wildlife which includes **pine marten**, **golden eagle**, **osprey**, **goshawk** and the famous **Glen Tanar beetle**.

We were fortunate to have as our guides Eric Baird, Head Ranger, and Mike Martin who were able to explain about the balancing act required to look after the different interests on the estate.



While forestry continues to be important it is managed to allow nesting of the resident **golden eagle** - for those dedicated photographers there is the expensive opportunity to spend time in a specially guarded hide allowing close ups of the fledgling birds (with all due permits!). This is part of a wider attempt to promote Scotland's wildlife like the Big Five of an African safari. As **capercaillie** are known to be in the area work continues to manage the overgrown **heather** by burning to encourage regeneration of **blaeberry**, their main food source. If you visit the area in April you will certainly see or hear **black grouse**. There is a healthy **pine marten** population, as demonstrated by the numerous scats seen on paths (full of **cherry** stones), but sadly few **wildcat**, possibly due to a crash in **rabbit** numbers.

In order to try and accommodate as many interests as possible the group divided, with the riverside group spending the afternoon looking at the Water of Tanar and the more ambitious of us walking up into the old **Caledonian pines**. The latter group had a lovely view of adult **osprey** circling above the trees and calling to their young. Most of us saw (and also stood on!) the tiny

**twinflower** plants (*Linnaea borealis*).

Meanwhile the riverside group stayed on level ground and looked at **dragonflies** and **damsel**flies, finding a fascinating **wasps'** nest suspended neatly from a branch overhanging the Water of Tanar.

Unfortunately we never did see a **Glen Tanar beetle** but if you look at the Facebook site for Glen Tanar you can see some great pictures of Murray, the new **golden eagle**.

Clare Reaney

## TENTSMUIR FUNGAL FORAY

14th September

We assembled at the car park and welcomed two couples - Ruth and Kenny from Livingstone and Linda and Stewart from York but staying in St Andrews - who'd seen the outing advertised on our website (a notable first!). We were also pleased to welcome Gordon Corbet from south Fife, our Honorary President. On the way along the path the party stopped for a short time to look at the plants in the small salt-marsh. While there Anne called our attention to a flock of **herons**, a most unusual sight, flying towards Tayport. A small group of **peewits** also attracted notice. Gordon kept his eye open for interesting invertebrates and he and Stevie began by lifting up several pieces of lying wood to check if any small creatures were sheltering underneath.

The whole of Tentsmuir seemed to be very dry and fungi were sparse, the worst fungus-hunting conditions that most of us can remember. In fact, after a short time it had become almost a competition to find the first specimen! Fortunately, it didn't take too long and Gordon Maxwell homed in on a **dark-red brittle-gill** (*Russula atrorubens*). Several of the striking purple and yellow caps of **plums and custard** (*Tricholomopsis rutilans*) were located soon after, with very small numbers of

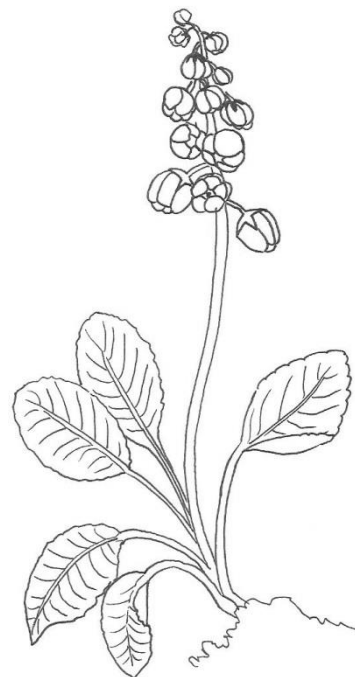
**deceivers** (*Laccaria laccata*), **ochre brittle-gills** (*Russula ochroleuca*) and **false chanterelles** (*Hygrophoropsis auranticaca*) widely scattered under the trees.

Gordon Maxwell led off the group in front to explore further along the track. Brian and Jenny Allan went with them and soon amassed a large haul of **chanterelles** (*Cantharellus cibarius*). Gordon and several others, with thoughts of supper, found a few more. A mass of **witches' butter** (*Exidia glandulosa*) attracted attention on a fallen **pine** branch beside the path while, on the mossy floor of the plantation, numbers of the tiny caps and thin dark stalks of **horse-hair fungus** (*Marasmius androsaceus*) were scattered about. Close by was another piece of old fallen wood with a small clump of **brain jelly fungus** (*Tremella encephala*). A few caps of the **rufous milk-cap** (*Lactarius rufus*) were found and proved their acrid peppery taste on the tips of one or two tongues!

Richard Brinklow came across a small patch of **creeping lady's-tresses** (*Goodyera repens*) and then a large clump of the leaves of **common winter-green** (*Pyrola minor*). This was dotted with the brown stalks of spikes which had already flowered. Close by was a small patch with the remains of a single very late flower. Heading over towards the beach, we located a few more fungi under the trees, one or two **roll-rims** (*Paxillus involutus*) and a **small roll-rim** (*P. panuoides*), several more **false chanterelles**, a small bunch of **clustered tough-shanks** (*Collybia confluens*) and then, over by the edge of forest, several **ergots** (*Claviceps purpurea*) on **grasses**.

Back along the beach the rearmost party met Anne who had walked further on and nearly reached the point. She reported **seals** of both species on the sand banks of the area. Turning back towards Tayport, we looked at sea-shells, mostly broken **cockles** and fresh pairs of tiny coloured **Baltic tellins** (*Macoma baltica*) amid a sprinkling of others, and kept a sharp eye open for interesting birds which included an occasional **shelduck**, a **whinchat** on the concrete 'dragon's teeth', one or two **sanderling** far down near the water's edge and another flying **curlew**.

Back at the cars, the party spent some time spreading out our few fungal specimens for comparison and identification and noting finds by various members. Perhaps the most notable sighting of all was by Lorna and a small group in front who were delighted to see a **white-tailed sea-eagle** flying over while being harassed by a **buzzard**.



Jim Cook

## AUTUMN LECTURES

### THE URBAN BIRDER

David Lindo - 9th October

The local RSPB group organised this lecture, by nationally well-known birder David Lindo, as a joint venture with the other local groups, including SOC, ADBC, SWT and Dundee Nats. Growing up in London, with a West Indian background, birdwatching was something which David discovered by himself in his garden and locally. His knowledge and understanding were greatly improved when he borrowed a bird book from his local library - a volume which he admitted to still having on loan.....!

His current enthusiasm for urban birds is undiluted - they can be found in the most unpromising places. We were exhorted to 'look up' but to avoid walking into lamp posts as he once did. David's 'local patch' is Wormwood Scrubs, the open ground adjacent to the jail, and he reported that he had seen more **ring ouzels** there, while on migration, than in summer habitats in Derbyshire or Scotland. Anything can turn up there and David seems to have an impressive list for the site. Further methods of urban birding in London involved getting monthly access to the top of a tall, City building and watching raptor migration.

The second part of David's talk covered urban birding in other cities around the world. Nairobi was particularly good as there is a Nature Reserve within the city boundary. Several 'hard to

see' species seemed to have put in special appearances when David visited and he acquired the name 'Lucky Lindo'. Eastern Europe provided such experiences as the improvisatory ringing methods in Latvia where bread was used to entice a **mute swan** close enough to grab and ring. One of his more memorable photographs showed hundreds of **long-eared owls** roosting in the trees in a village square in Serbia.

The main message from the lecture was to keep our eyes open wherever we were and enjoy any birds that might be there. Many of us already do this, but more will now 'look up' even in city centres.

David had the following morning free before he travelled back south, so Graham Smith and Jon Cook took him out and about in Dundee and notched up a very creditable 59 species between Balmossie in the east and Riverside Park in the west. A fitting finale to his first visit to Dundee.

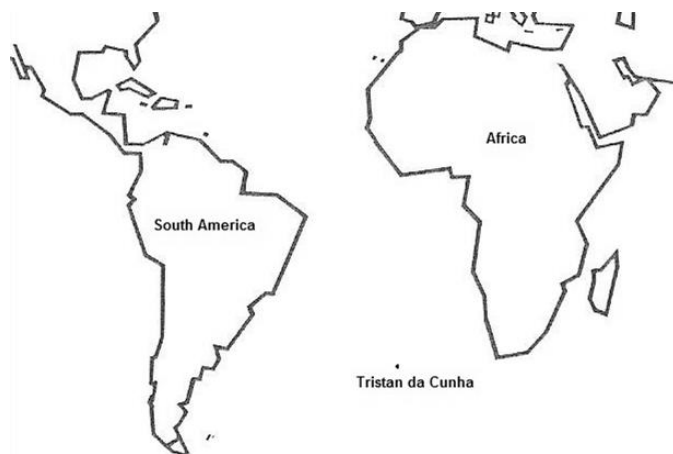
Anne Reid

## VASCULAR PLANTS OF TRISTAN DA CUNHA

Jim McIntosh - 15th October

Our winter programme began in grand style with an excellent and fascinating lecture by Jim McIntosh, Scottish Officer of the BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles), describing his time surveying the vegetation of this most remote of all the Atlantic Islands, first colonised in 1815 to forestall any possible rescue attempt of Napoleon by French forces. Jim had spent nearly a year doing a detailed survey of the flowering plants and ferns of the island, in co-operation with Lourens Malan, a South African botanist who'd lived on the island for some time.

Jim had need of the companionship because, although it is a small island, only about 12km across, it is mostly very rough and precipitous and supports a tiny human population of just 261, all in the (capital!) township of Edinburgh of the Seven Seas on the only reasonably large area of level ground to the north-east. The botanical survey work was funded by the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP) and supported by Kew Gardens. He began by describing the location and principal features of the islands, a small archipelago consisting of Tristan itself, about a million years old, uninhabited Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands and Gough Island, some 350 km away, which supports a small weather station. All are volcanic in origin, sited along the mid-Atlantic ridge, and the oldest arose around 30 million years ago. The nearest inhabited lands are South Africa and the island of St Helena, both of which are some 2,500 km distant. Tristan does not support an airfield and the only access is by sea. The government maintains a ship, the 'Baltic Trader', which visits once every few months after a 6-day voyage from Cape Town if the weather is good. Two fishing boats exploit the seas around about and there is a small fish-processing factory. The rest of the population support themselves by rearing sheep and a few cattle and cultivating small stone-walled enclosures of potatoes and vegetables. We also heard about popular local mass activities including 'ratting' - efforts to control the rodent population. Jim mentioned several times that he couldn't have found the islanders friendlier and more helpful and he reciprocated when he could by helping with such tasks as rounding up and shearing the sheep.



The island is located at 37.5° south (further south than the Cape of Good Hope) and rather close to the Roaring Forties, which can mean very rough seas and even more difficult conditions for off-loading cargo onto lighters (there is no safe harbour) and wind-swept landscapes on the island. Jim's trip took 9 days, followed by a further 5 days to off-load. The winds also bring rain, which is recorded on about 250 days a year, although it tends to arrive in short sharp bursts. Otherwise the weather tends to be sunny and the thin ozone layer means that UV levels are rather intense. Humidity is high and temperatures are generally

moderate at sea level, never falling below 5°C nor rising above 25°C. The central volcano known as Queen Mary's Peak rises, however, to 2,000m and supports a snow cap for some 6 months of the year.

The generally tough conditions mean that travel over the island can be difficult, to say the least, and the audience was treated to sufficient images of the landscape dissected by deep and precipitous gulches and dense vegetation to convince us all that the only way to cover the ground was to expend much effort in walking, carrying a tent, supplies and all their surveying and recording gear, and then camp. In practice, he and Lourens spent a total of 40 nights under canvas on the high plateau.

The island was divided into 120 one-km squares, each of which typically contained 60 species of plants, although the two botanists didn't reach all of them. The vegetation consisted primarily of masses of waist-high bushes and ferns, difficult to push through, areas of rough grassland dominated by, of all things, our own very well-known **Yorkshire fog grass**, *Holcus lanatus*, which is an invasive alien, plus a higher altitude belt of mosses and lichens that grades into the bare moonscape of the ash and lava fields surrounding the central peak of the volcano. Only 85 plants are recorded as native, with a high proportion of endemics (not surprising given the island's isolation) and nearly 150 introduced species. Bryophyte species are even more abundant, with 149 mosses and 160 liverworts, and an estimated 250 species of lichens. The two botanists recorded 69 of the native higher plant species and also found a new one!

The most common native plants are **bog fern**, *Blechnum palmiforme* (related to our **hard fern** although resembling a small **tree-fern**), and its close relative *B. penna-marina*, both recorded in 97 of the 101 one-km squares surveyed. A small bush, **island berry**, *Empetrum rubrum* (a relative of our **crowberry**), is very common as well. There is one larger plant in that wind-swept landscape, the so-called **island tree**, *Phyllica arborea*, (a member of the Rhamnaceae or **buckthorn** family) which towers, if that is the right word, to all of 2m (six feet) high!

Other plants of interest include the **bootlace fern**, *Radiovittaria ruiziana*, another fern, *Rostkovia tristanensis*, which is endemic, and the **club-moss** *Lycopodium magellanicum*, that also occurs on the Falkland Islands and the South American mainland.

To vary his coverage of the wildlife a little, Jim also showed us images of a few birds. These included the **Tristan thrush**, known as a **starchie** to the locals, and **rockhopper penguins**. Two **albatross** species sweep over the seas around the island and, as well as the adults, we saw a delightful photograph of large and fluffy **sooty albatross** chicks sitting, carefully spaced out, just over two beak-lengths apart, on their mound-like nests.

He obviously had found his extended visit both fascinating and highly enjoyable - and so did his audience, who questioned him eagerly on a number of points and rewarded the lecturer with a hearty vote of thanks.

Jim Cook



## THE SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST AND HOW IT PROTECTS OUR ENVIRONMENT

Liz Houghton - 29th October

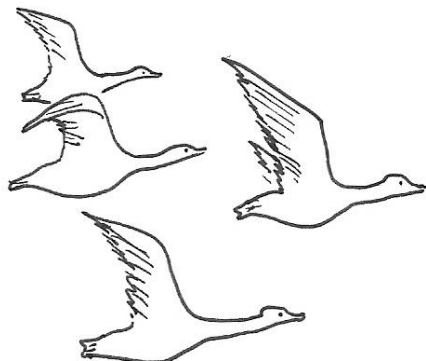
Those who didn't manage the evening talk missed a most interesting and enjoyable evening. Liz provided a very informative talk on a subject about which she is obviously passionate, since she first joined SWT soon after it was set up in the 1960s.

Despite being a member myself for many years, it certainly opened my eyes to some aspects of their work I knew little of. The main functions of SWT include education, representation, practical work on their sites and influencing Councils and other bodies.

The SWT pinpoints sites of interest which are worth preserving for various reasons. They will campaign locally, nationally and internationally on our behalf to buy or protect these sites, eg purchase of land to prevent construction of wind farms, dams, etc. Once these sites are acquired, they must be monitored through practical work and volunteers are always needed.

Major projects, such as those affecting **red squirrels** and **beavers**, are often undertaken in conjunction with bodies such as the Forestry Commission and John Muir Trust.

Education is an important part of their remit and centres such as Montrose Basin, Loch of the Lowes and Falls of Clyde include facilities for schools. Up to 70,000 visitors a year visit Falls of Clyde to see Cora Linn, the main waterfall, which has been a big draw for artists and tourists alike for three centuries. This all requires staffing both indoors and out.



Loch of the Lowes at Dunkeld is an important area for **ospreys** which are monitored round the clock from their arrival each spring.

In Angus, Montrose Basin and Visitor Centre belongs to SWT. This is an amazing place boasting a huge array of birds all year round, but especially famed for its wintering **geese**. Also in Angus SWT look after Seaton Cliffs at Arbroath, Balgavies and Lintrathen Lochs as well as 'the Miley' in Dundee, a short stretch of nature walk along the line of the former Newtyle railway line.

Most SWT sites are located across the Central Belt as it is here that we find most of the biodiversity sites designated as being 'at risk'.

Wildlife Trust membership in Scotland is lower per head of population than in England, consequently there is less funding generally available for SWT's work. Perhaps we should all consider joining SWT to help preserve special parts of our country for future generations.

Liz Olejnik

## ATLANTIC HAZELWOODS

Brian and Sandy Coppins - 12th November  
Joint Meeting with Botanical Society of Scotland

Brian and Sandy Coppins are well-known lichenologists and Brian has recently retired from his post at the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh. Brian has been investigating British lichens for many years and has described a number of species new to this island and also new to science. This lichen work led him and Sandy on to a study of the Atlantic Hazelwoods, particularly in north-west Scotland.

Brian and Sandy have played a leading role in bringing attention to the importance of the Atlantic Hazelwoods of Scotland, which represent a very special plant community. These are not scrub but a very special type of temperate rainforest. **Hazel** was one of the first trees to colonise the British Isles after the last ice age, extending up the west coastal fringe and then elsewhere. These woods do not normally represent a neglected coppice or a remnant of high forest and in fact coppicing can reduce their biodiversity.

Some very special lichens are to be seen here, some of which are unique to these places. In this talk we saw pictures of some including *Lobaria pulmonaria* (**lungwort**), *Arthrothelium macounii*, *Pyrenula hibernica* (**plums and custard**) and many others.

The Hazelwoods are also very rich in mosses and liverworts which require a damp oceanic climate. Amongst others we were shown *Neckera pumila* and *Frullania teneriffae*. Fungi are also a feature of these places and species shown included **bleeding broadleaf crust** (*Stereum rugosum*) and **scarlet elf cup** (*Sarcocypha austriaca*). The **glue fungus** (*Hymenochaete corrugata*) traps falling twigs and leaves and the rather eerie **hazel gloves** (*Hypocreopsis rhododendri*) adds character to the woodland.

In places ferns are abundant including **hay-scented buckler fern** (*Dryopteris aemula*) and **golden-scaled male-fern** (*Dryopteris affinis*), whereas elsewhere spring flowers such as **bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and **dog's mercury** (*Mercurialis perennis*) predominate.

Brian and Sandy are to be thanked for raising the profile of this important and beautiful habitat which is of such importance for Scottish nature conservation, both in their well-illustrated talk and also their excellent book.

Brian Ballinger

## CONSERVING THE SMALL THINGS THAT RUN THE WORLD

Craig McAdam - 26th November

A healthy audience enjoyed our fascinating lecture from Craig McAdam of Buglife. I'm sure those attending gained great insights into the diversity and the importance of conserving our amazing and beautiful miniature world, where everything has its niche in the web of life, whether scavenging, pollinating or as a food source for higher species, and how this benefits mankind. Craig inspired increased awareness of the importance of protecting habitats appropriate to the needs of particular creatures and how habitat loss, climate change and pollution all present challenges not only to the larger mammals and birds, but also to these tiny beings who have the same basic needs.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking lecture which sparked interesting questions which Craig fielded knowledgeably. The evening concluded with a well-deserved vote of thanks.

Stevie Smith

## FORFAR LOCH WALK

30th November

We met at Forfar Loch Ranger Station at 10am for our walk round the loch. It was a lovely morning, not cold or windy, as just ten members gathered. We were greeted by a string of **mallards**, who had obviously heard our voices and thought that food must be on offer and eventually around 40 of the ducks stood waiting and watching as we prepared for our walk. They got nothing!

As we set off, on the Loch we could see quite a few **goldeneye, tufted duck, teal, moorhen** and **gulls**. In the bushes, alongside the path, we saw **robins, tits**, including **long-tailed tits, wren, yellowhammer** and a **reed bunting**. Two or three **magpies** were heard and seen and some of the group were lucky enough to get good views of a **redwing** sitting atop a tree before flying off.

Proceeding towards the west end, a **heron** flew over the loch, a **dabchick** was spotted and three pairs of very handsome **goosanders** were seen at the far side.



Alongside the path were many fresh **molehills** and also signs of **rabbits**. Trees included **spruce, beech, birch** and **elder** and there was also some new planting on the south west side. Stevie found evidence of the fungus *Phlebia radiata* on a **poplar** stump, along with **yellow disco fungus** (*Bisporella* sp.). Signs of gnawing **beavers** were very obvious at the west end (close to where the stream comes into the loch), where a few **willow** branches had been cleanly cut through, with clear teeth marks visible.

Returning along the south side, some of the group spotted a small group of **bullfinches**, a **goldcrest** and a single **greylag goose** flying overhead. Our walk finished without us seeing any rarities, but we had all enjoyed our two hour stroll. The hungry group then visited a local hostelry where we enjoyed a very tasty lunch.

Liz Olejnik

## SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES

Colin McLeod - 11th December  
Dundee Afternoon Lecture

Colin gave us an account of the 47 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) which are managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Some are owned by SNH, others leased from private owners and some owned by non-governmental organisations such as the RSPB, National Trust for Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The whole area covered by the reserves is about 95,000 hectares.

Colin then took us on a clockwise tour of the NNRs in Scotland, illustrating each with one or two slides reminding us of the outstanding beauty of much of Scotland's landscape. He described the particular wildlife or geological value of each reserve. Some of the finest conservation areas in the country are included in the list.

Some NNRs such as St. Cyrus, Corrie Fee, the Isle of May, Ben Lawers and Tentsmuir are well known to many of us whereas others are less familiar. Some remote areas such as Rum and St. Kilda have been visited by a few, whereas others such as the Monach Isles and Rona are very inaccessible. In contrast to the past, visits to reserves are now encouraged and welcomed. Educational programmes are important in some places and research also takes place on some sites. Management plans are in place to maintain the quality of the reserves.

The number of NNRs in Scotland has fallen in recent years, partly because of amalgamations, but also because of de-designations related to a review of biodiversity interest and because of the management practices of some owners.

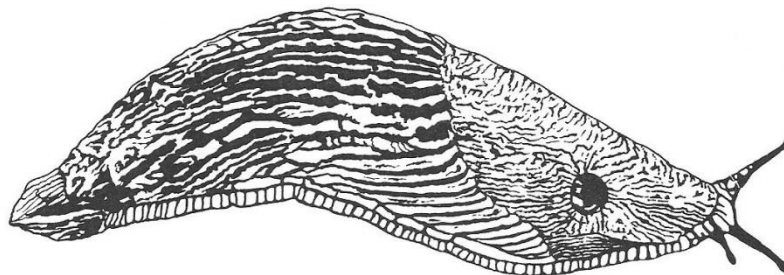
Colin also provided a selection of free SNH leaflets and booklets to supplement his informative and enjoyable talk.

Brian Ballinger

## DORSET DELIGHTS

Stevie Smith - 17th December

Stevie and Jim have taken their main summer holiday for the past six years at a campsite in Dorset and keep going back for the wide variety of natural history both on the site and nearby. The campsite is partly an SSSI and has a large pond, grassland, mature trees and a golf course and many of the photos we were shown were 'on site'. The owner's wife spotted lights on the golf course one night and was all for investigating until her husband reminded her that Stevie and Jim were in



residence! What they were actually doing was photographing mating **slugs!** It very much sounded as if normal sleep patterns were ignored and natural history was pursued with the cameras at all times of the day and night.

Other localities were also visited including parts of the New Forest in neighbouring Hampshire and the wealth of wildlife seen ranged from **fallow deer** to **bog beacon fungus** via **natterjack toad** and **leopard moth** with much else in between, mostly not found in our northern climes. Stevie also regaled us with interesting tales such as handling a **smooth snake** (under the supervision of a licensed researcher) and of **long-eared bats** in the boiler house at the campsite. A locally very scarce **wood cricket** was found under their tent when they struck camp - it had found a habitat to its liking, however temporary!

This account does not do justice to the huge range of excellent photographs, many close-ups of insects and tiny fungi, which Stevie showed us - we could happily have watched another hour of the same. Everyone thanked Stevie most enthusiastically for her presentation. This being our Christmas meeting, we adjourned to the usual festive fare and cup of tea which enabled everyone to have a good chat.

Anne Reid

## MEMBERS' ARTICLES

### INTERESTING SIGHTINGS 2013

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

March was unremittingly cold with unseasonal snow and a strong, biting, easterly wind for most of the second half of the month. The prolonged bad weather resulted in a seabird 'wreck', largely consisting of **puffins** and other **auks**, all along the east coast from Northumberland to Aberdeenshire. April remained cold so the spring was very late and **daffodils** persisted well into May.

After this we had a relatively good summer with a heatwave in the middle of July but it turned very wet in late autumn and early winter.. By the end of the year there had been few overnight frosts and many plants retained flowers.

Brian Ballinger	BB	Dundee, West End
Jim Cook	JC	Broughty Ferry
Daphne Macfarlane Smith	DMS	Broughty Ferry
Colin McLeod	CM	Dundee
Liz Olejnik	LO	Wormit
Margaret Palin	MP	Barnhill
Anne Reid	AR	Monifieth
Davie Stein	DS	Dundee, West Kirkton
Brian Williamson	BW	Dundee, Law area

**1st January** Two **sea eagles** flying low over Wormit Hill, heading for Wormit Bay this morning. LO.

**10th January** At around 10am a **green parrot** (*Amazona* type) flew squawking westwards over the garden. (In previous years two have been seen along Strathern Road but they failed to breed.) DMS.

**18th January** A male **blackcap** in my garden in Wormit. LO.

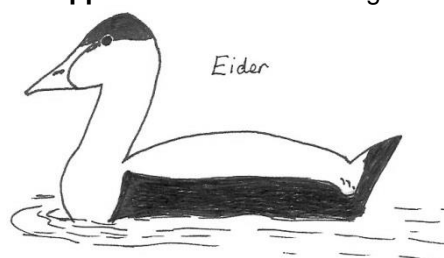
**24th January** I spotted a **long-eared owl** roosting low in the **hawthorn** hedge west of Kingoodie. **Tree sparrows** mixed in with **house sparrows** twittered on the roadside, a **great spotted woodpecker** looped across between the trees along the road. BW.

**26th January** A party of **long-tailed tits** came to my garden peanut feeders. Instead of the usual fleeting visit, they stayed much longer than usual and kept coming back for more. Possibly they were very hungry after the continuous snow the previous day. AR.

**26th January** A **kingfisher** seen on the pond on Tayfield Estate. LO.

**29th January** Enjoyed watching nine **long-tailed tits** in our **crab-apple** tree and also feeding on peanuts. DMS.

**7th February** Calm water at Lower Largo provided a range of winter visitors including **red-throated diver**, **long-tailed duck**, **Slavonian grebe**, **velvet scoter**, **common scoter**, and all the usual coastal birds such as **shag**, **eider duck**, **oystercatcher**, **razorbill** and **redshank**. BW.



**9th February** Out for three hours walking between Wormit and Tayport. Saw a large flock of over 300 **fieldfares** mixed with **redwing** and **starlings**. Also about 30 **lapwing**, three **roe deer**, a pair of **great spotted woodpeckers**, a flock of **long-tailed tits**, a dozen **tree sparrows**, a **kestrel** and numerous more common birds. One **hawthorn** bush was showing some nice green leaves, it gives us hope for spring. LO.

**13th February** Snow fell to depth of 3½ inches but only lasted a day. DMS.

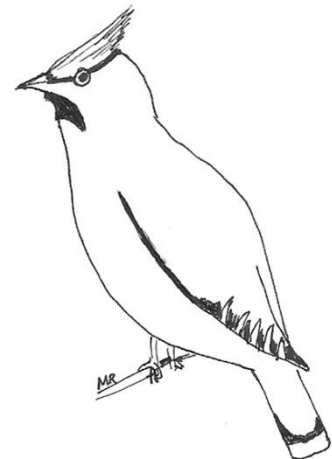
**19th February** Much of the Loch of Kinnordy was frozen, but I still found 20 **whooper swans**, a male **smew** in all his splendour, about 100 **greylag geese** on surrounding fields, and **teal**, **wigeon**, **mallard** and **tufted duck** packed together on the remaining open water. BW.

**19th February** Early in the morning, a solitary **blackbird** was singing lustily, the first I'd heard this year, although **robins** have been singing late at night for some time. JC.

**24th February** A **peregrine falcon** went into a hunting stoop over Adelaide Place, but I failed to see the target. BW.



- 2nd March** A winter visit to Montrose Basin and the SWT Visitor Centre was rewarding. At the Lurgies a **grey wagtail**, a gathering of eleven **little grebes** and **long-tailed ducks** entertained us, but we also saw **red-breasted merganser**, **scaup**, **red-throated diver**, **pintail** (c. 50) and **bar-tailed godwit**. A **sparrowhawk** attacked finches on the feeder, and a determined **carrion crow** lifted **mussels** from the beach into the air to drop and break open for a snack. BW.
- 3rd March** A **red kite** being mobbed by a **buzzard** over Newlands Wood, Stanley. CM.
- 9th March** I noted a **kestrel** hunting over The Law and a **magpie** in the trees. BW.
- 11th March** At 2pm I noticed a **fox** eating **frogs** by the garden pond. At 3pm a **crow** was eating a **frog** near the pond. BB.
- 17th March** After yet another late dusting of snow, I saw the clear footprints of what must have been a large **fox**. It came up through the bushes at one side of the garden, veered past the bin recess, but didn't go in, and then straight up and over the next door neighbour's fence (nearly two metres high). JC. (Snow has its plus points! Ed.)
- 18th March** Light snow blizzards. Saw 15 **siskins** in the garden, but there were at least 48 in a tree across the road. DMS.
- 18th March** Sleet covering the garden! The feeders were busy with **brambling** (lone female), **siskin** (two females), **coal tit**, **blue tit**, **great tit**, **long-tailed tit**, **goldfinch**, **chaffinch**, **greenfinch**, **blackbird**, **dunnock** and a **wood pigeon**. BW.
- 19th March** Unseasonally heavy snow led to increased activity around my garden bird feeders. For the first time ever I had two **linnets** on the nyger feeder for a short while in the morning. AR.
- 24th March** Still a bitterly cold east wind which is resulting in more birds seeking food in the garden. Today we had 13 species which included a **song thrush** and a **blackbird** feeding on the black berries of *Sarcococca*, **sweet box**. DMS.
- 25th March** About 20 **waxwings** paid a visit to the garden in late afternoon and spent some time busily preening in the large **rowan** at the back. MP.
- 30th March** After daily snow flurries for what seems like most of March we had a walk along Arbroath Cliffs to Carlingheugh Bay in bright sunshine. There appeared to be hope of spring as the **celandines** and **coltsfoot** flowers were fully open and I even saw a **dandelion** in flower on a south-facing slope. AR.
- 31st March** A **woodpecker** drumming at the Miley. (Also one heard yesterday at Brownie Wood by Gauldry.) BB.
- 31st March** A **coot** sitting on a nest by the ice at Dam Pond by Tealing. One hopes that the ice will be gone before the eggs hatch. BB.
- 1st April** On a walk in north Fife we saw our first **celandines**, four **roe deer**, a **hare** and some **partridges**. Spring at last? LO.
- 6th April** At long last, the first **buff-tailed bumblebee** of the year in the garden. It has been too cold this spring for them to emerge earlier from hibernation. AR.
- 11th April** At Loch of Kinnordy saw for the first time this spring a pair of **marsh harriers** in courtship display, and the male **smew** that had been around the loch for some weeks gave fine viewing. BW.
- 14th April** The first **swallow** of the year recorded at Carsegowniemuir cottage. Spring must have arrived at last! JC.
- 14th April** A **blackbird** was seen nest building in the garden and I saw my first **buff-tailed bumblebee** (queen) of the year. DMS.
- 24th April** In mid-afternoon there was a **chiffchaff** calling from the top of a tall tree in the grounds of Dundee College's Gardyne campus, just off Strips of Craigie. It was only the second I'd ever heard in Broughty Ferry. JC.
- 30th April** My first sightings of **swallow** and **house martin** near our home. BW.
- 1st May** I was very surprised when I came out of Dobbies, Monifieth to find an **oystercatcher** nest with three eggs in the flower bed immediately outside the doors. The bird had just wandered off but was not far away. I don't hold out much hope for successful fledging but you never know..... (It failed - too much disturbance.) AR.
- 5th May** Four species of bumblebee in our garden at one time - one **buff-tailed**, one **white-tailed**, one **early** and one **red-tailed**. Also saw three **swifts** - my first of the year. DMS.
- 9th May** A **buzzard** mobbed by **crows**, and a **kestrel** flew over our garden. BW.
- 17th May** I had a lovely walk from Tayport and through the woods and saw a few interesting things. First an **osprey** fishing in the river, then my first two **orange tip butterflies** of the year, a few

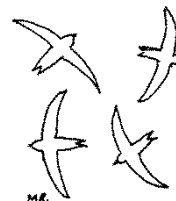


**tortoiseshells**, a **fox**, and then back at the Tayport end two male **reed buntings**, a **whitethroat** and, best of all, a **comma butterfly** feeding on a **dandelion!** The sun even shone all morning. LO.

**20th May** At Tentsmuir this morning, with Carole Wood and our four dogs, and had good views of a **sea eagle** feeding on a carcass on the shore. It had two blue wing tags and a definite white tail so it is a 2009 bird and four years old. Also saw two **ringed plovers** which were rather sweet. LO.

**25th May** My first sighting of **swifts** over Broughty Ferry Beach. BW

**30th May** At least 15 **northern marsh orchids** were growing well (but mostly had flowered already) in the wide grassy verge, purposely left un-mowed by the Council, of the Dundee Road just over the railway from Stannergate shore. JC. (Brian Allan reported that there had been a **heath spotted orchid** on the site this summer, for the first time. Ed.)



**30th May** Sunny and warm at Loch of Kinnordy and a **coot** with two chicks appeared in the **bogbean**. I had a close view of the male **garganey** (summer visitor) at Gullery Hide, an **osprey** put in an appearance amongst all the usual residents. BW.

**5th June** At Kingoodie Shore and in fields north of the railway I was delighted to encounter a singing **grasshopper warbler** only three to five yards away in the wild **raspberries**. **Willow warbler** and **sedge warbler** were also nearby, a **yellowhammer** perched high on an ash tree and **tree sparrows** chirped in the hawthorn bushes with **house sparrows**. BW.

**9th June** We rarely see **starlings** in our garden these days so it was good to see four juveniles pecking at the lawn, possibly seeking **leather-jackets**. DMS.

**16th June** Don't often see even one **bat** in our garden so astonished to see two tonight at 22.10. (Came again on 21st but then no more.) DMS.

**3rd July** After a wet night, the garden was still very damp. While pulling some weeds in the afternoon there was a movement in the vegetation and I saw a large **frog** - definitely not a **toad** - moving out of the way. A few minutes later there was another rather smaller one. It was the first time I'd ever seen any **frogs** in the garden. It's rather a surprise since so far as I'm aware there are no garden ponds anywhere close in the street. JC.

**11th July** Had highest **butterfly** count of year on my transect at Kinshaldy, a total of 176 made up of three **small coppers**, 23 **common blues**, six **dark green fritillaries**, 37\* **meadow browns**, 70\* **ringlets** and 37 **small heaths**. \* These numbers, on one visit, are higher than the annual totals for the past two years! DMS.

**17th July** A walk south from Loch Tay at Ardtalnaig towards Glen Almond gave a fine sight of a **red kite** hunting, **oystercatchers**, **wheatears**, **meadow pipits** and a calling **golden plover** on the summit of Creagan na Beinne. BW.

**21st July** Two **red kites** seen at Hill of Wirren, Glen Lethnot, Angus. One had a red tag on its right wing, too distant to read, but meaning it hatched in 2012 - I couldn't see if there was any tag on the other bird. (No other birds of prey were seen over this heavily-kept **grouse** moor in a full day's walk, despite an abundance of **rabbits**.) CM.

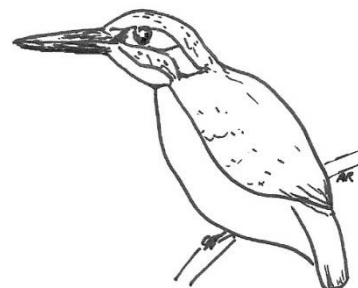
**8th August** At Invergowrie Bay at low tide was surprised to find about 60 **sandwich terns** roosting on rocks in the middle of the mud. BW.

**11th August** A flooded field opposite Letham, Fife (locally called 'Letham Ponds') provided wonderful views of migrating waders this summer, including **green sandpiper**, **common sandpiper**, **ruff** (7 males, 1 reeve), **greenshank**, **snipe** (c. 9), and **dunlin**. Large flocks of **sand martins**, with **swallows** and **swifts** wheeled over the water. BW.

**25th August** A **tawny owl** was heard calling from Wilstead's Wood to the south of Carsegowniemuir quarry at about 5pm and then, on the way back home, another **tawny owl** was seen sitting on a road-side fence post near Idvies. JC.

**27th August** A **painted lady** was in neighbour's garden, the only one in our area this year. DMS.

**29th August** A **kingfisher** spent ten minutes perched on a post outside the hide at Eden Estuary and caught four fish in the river. At close range on the River Eden saw **little egret**, **common sandpiper**, **greenshank**, **dunlin** and **black-tailed godwits** (some in summer colours), and four **gosander** cruised up-river. BW.



**31st August** Quite excited to see first ever **comma** in our garden! It was nectaring on **Bowles mauve** (perennial wallflower) which is a popular nectar source for all butterflies. The **comma** came again during the next two days but then vanished. DMS.

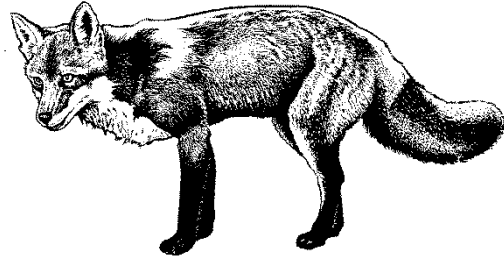
**17th September** Four **dippers** and a **kingfisher** seen along a short stretch of the River North Esk at Gallery (NO 679 659). CM.

**18th September** At Letham Ponds, Fife again saw a male **ruff, tufted duck, mallard, coot** and a few **swallows** and **house martins** on migration. BW.

**22nd September** A handsome **red fox** was seen in the street lights crossing the road from the entrance to Dawson Park at about 11pm. JC.

**23rd September** I heard a **chiffchaff** in Adelaide Place, Dundee. BW.

**1st October** One and only **red admiral** of the year was in our garden. The butterfly survey at Kinshaldy is over for another year. Overall total is the third highest in last ten years. DMS.



**1st October** A number of cawing **crows** over the house next door attracted my attention and then the cause of the commotion flew over very low. It was a young **buzzard**, the first I've seen so close in this part of Broughty Ferry. JC.

**8th October** More than 50 **dunlin, redshank** and three **black-tailed godwits** (one still in summer russet plumage) were feeding on the newly exposed mud of Invergowrie Bay. **Teal** and **mallard** swam on the retreating tide, a **cormorant** was drying his wings, and the usual **oystercatchers** and **gulls** were also in attendance. BW.

**12th October** I came back from shopping to find a fresh **red admiral** on the **marigolds** beside my front door. Once inside, I looked out at the bird feeders where there were two **tree sparrows** - last seen in the garden at about the same time a year ago. AR.

**16th October** In heavy rain, at about 8pm, I saw a fine adult **fox** rapidly moving from garden to garden near the Broughty end of Strathern Road. JC.

**20th October** A female **blackcap** appeared briefly in the garden and was seen to take a **rowan** berry from the tree and disappear into cover to eat it. AR.

**22nd October** Above the roar of the traffic in Dundee, I caught the thin 'tseep-tseep' calls of **redwings** passing overhead in the dark. Although I'd already heard and seen them elsewhere, it somehow was comforting and appropriate to hear the birds flying low over the city. JC.

**23rd October** Just west of Wormit towards Balmerino I saw five **roe deer**, four **bullfinches** and two **redwings**, which were the first of the year for me. LO.

**24th October** The rather low water level at Loch of Lintrathen was a surprise, but more than 30 **whooper swans** had arrived early for winter and were dispersed among **mute swans, Canada geese** and **greylag geese**. I also found three pairs of **goosander**, a **great crested grebe, wigeon, teal, tufted duck** and **mallard**, and a few **lapwings** roosted on the exposed bank. BW.

**1st November** Just along the shore from Tayport carpark we had a wonderfully close-up view of an adult **sea eagle**. It flew out of the trees on our right and across in front of us, perhaps 200 yards away, and then round to our left as if it was going towards Tayport. LO.

**8th November** While looking for ringed **dippers** on the Dighty I saw a **mink** searching amongst the tree roots at the edge of the burn, just under the Seven Arches. Not good for nesting **dippers!** AR.

**11th November** I had good views of a large **otter** in the river about a quarter of a mile west of the old salmon bothy along from Wormit Bay. My first local sighting in over 30 years of living here in Wormit. LO.

**13th November** A female **blackcap** in the garden. BB.

**13th November** I can hardly believe my luck after my sighting earlier this week. This morning, in the pond in Tayfield Estate, Newport, I watched an **otter** swimming about and catching fish for about 10 minutes. It even came right up close and I could see the line of bubbles but by then it was hidden by a **laurel** hedge. I had only gone in to spot the **kingfisher** on my walk. I spoke to the gardener Steven and he reported that five members of the public have seen it lately, and also his wife and children but not himself. He immediately stopped walling and went off to see if he could see it. After that I saw two **red squirrels** nearby in among the **beech** trees. LO.

**17th November** I was astonished to see a **swallow** flying back and forth along the shore at Carnoustie. I presume all the others had long since headed off to Africa! DMS.

**23rd November** A pair of **jays** was feeding on **acorns** in Balgay Hill Woods, a **wren** was feeding in a **blackberry** bush near the path and a **great spotted woodpecker** was busy high in the trees. BW.

**24th November** Two **foxes** explored our garden summer house at 8.00 am! BW.

**27th November** On a walk up the Dighty I came across a **kingfisher** looking very bright on a dull afternoon. I hadn't seen one locally for several years even though they are known to frequent various stretches of the Dighty. AR.

**27th November** The first **magpie** I have ever seen in Dundee visited our garden. It only stayed a few minutes and then was gone. DS.

**1st December** A **red admiral butterfly** was seen fluttering at the front of the house in the warm sunshine. AR.

**2nd December** A **song thrush** was singing heartily in a tree beside Abertay University Library at 4.15 pm. BW.

**3rd December** Just before 9am at Dundee railway station I heard a **song thrush** in full voice, somewhere west of the most distant platform. AR.

**5th December** Rain and gale then the first snow flurries of winter. Craigowl white. DMS.

**8th December** I enjoyed watching the **red-throated diver** in Victoria Dock near the Apex Hotel - a bird with a damaged wing that has been a resident in the dock since 26th December '12. BW.

**21st December** A **carrion crow** flew onto a roof across the road, showing a lot of white in both wings and its tail. DMS.

**24th December** Two adult **foxes** in our garden again at 10.00 am. BW.

**29th December** Rewarded on a winter sunny afternoon walk along the Newtyle Railway track, between Rosemill and Dronley, with a flock of **yellowhammers** (c.50), **twite** (3), **long-tailed tits** (c. 25, feeding in old **willows**), **fieldfare** (c. 10), **mistle thrush**, **buzzard** (3), **lapwing** (22), **tree sparrow** and other more common species. A delightful walk. BW.

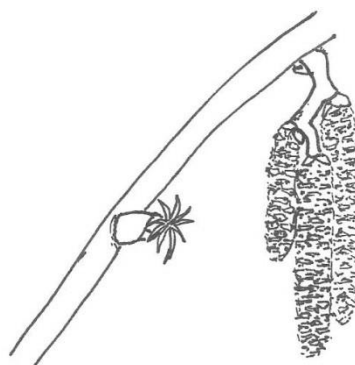
## RAMBLES WITH STEVIE 2013

The start of the year presented challenges due to conditions underfoot of persistently waterlogged paths, muddy and slippery which then froze to icy and slippery. Nevertheless, while it may have slowed me down somewhat, it did not prevent me altogether from my daily rambles - both walking and talking! The flooded field at St Vigean's Nature Trail, in addition to all the regulars, attracted two **mute swans** and a **wigeon**, resplendent with its apricot head. Early January showed me some of nature's jewels, tiny but spectacular female **hazel** flowers in the Millennium Forest at St Vigean's Den. Quite early I thought, but then this is quite a sheltered valley, a microclimate if you like.

Another particularly crisp day produced three contrasting fungi, each in prime condition, feeling the effects of the deep freeze. *Exidia recisa*, a brown **jelly fungus** was frozenly festooned over **birch** branches, while the common *Flammulina velutipes*, growing on a stump, having wonderful vivid fiery colours and being frozen, also had a sprinkling of frosted snow lying on the caps. The **scarlet elf cups** which were well admired on our Nats New Year walk were looking even more spectacular, contrasting well against what little snow had landed round them and I was pleased to note that these had also spread to three other sites along the trail.

Incidentally, **jelly fungus** is said to be edible and though not contributing much in the way of flavour, is said to add a certain "snappiness" to stews! (Whatever that means! Ed.)

Hearing a commotion outside the window, I was somewhat dismayed to see the male **sparrowhawk**, not with my solitary **tree sparrow**, thankfully, but a squawking **starling** in its talons on the patio, and felt rather guilty, having enticed all manner of feathered friends to feed here. However,



did I bang on the window to scare off the raptor? Sadly, I did not. Instead, I trotted through to fetch my camera! The **sparrowhawk** is often unsuccessful hunting here, probably because we have a lot of hedging behind the feeders and the birds tend to be vigilant.

A jaunt to Kinshaldy with Davie Stein had two Nats on their knees, excitedly photographing the brightly coloured **dung fungi**, *Coprobia granulata*, with its rash of tiny orange cups. A horsey bonus, such a good growing medium for all sorts! At Ethie Woods, the rare fungus *Pseudoplectania nigrella*, had only two specimens visible this year.

A visit to Backmuir Woods in March had 20 plus **waxwings**, observed feeding on **flies**. Behaviour we've never seen before from these birds, and so late for them to still be in the UK.

Jim and I had cause to celebrate and travelled to the Caribbean for a spring holiday. We visited a rainforest, where the downpour was so heavy it hurt! The Caribbean is not that great for wildlife, but we made the best of what there was and returned with photos of various invertebrates, birds, **green turtles**, the intriguing **iguanas** and other exotic **lizards**. We returned home in mid-April to find it was still snowing.

No sooner had we returned than it was time to head off to Ireland for our son's wedding and the chance of snatched opportunities for nature watching. The weekend was particularly stormy but this surely enhanced the waves crashing over the Giant's Causeway and enabled the **fulmars** to hover effortlessly.

Back home, a climb into the attic after noise from above, surprised us with a 2ft high nest. The industrious **jackdaws** had been throwing sticks down the lum in our absence. After no activity for several days, Jim investigated, to find three cracked eggs in the nest. Maybe one of the birds had thrown an additional stick down after the eggs had been laid. Probably an inexperienced pair.

I was rather perturbed to spot "our" **carrion crow** hopping along the top of the *Leylandii* hedge searching for nests with hatchlings. I still have a soft spot for these intelligent birds though and I loved to watch the demanding behaviour of the single chick they produced - what a shouter!

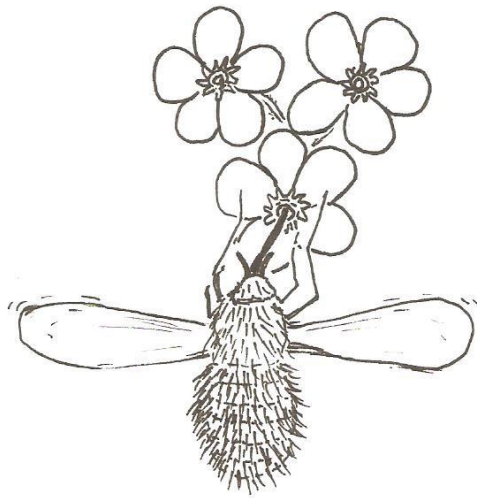
A weekend break to Boat of Garten had us entertained once more by a **starling**. This one was hooting like an **owl**. We also saw and heard one mimic a **buzzard**, but the burning question is - was it the same bird and does it have a repertoire of raptors? Woodland walking in the area produced **false morels**, fabulous but poisonous. Overturning a chunk of bark had me trying to photograph a tiny **pseudoscorpion**, an arachnid complete with tiny claws, only a few millimetres long. Still no **emperor moth** sightings, nor have I managed to capture a photo of a **bee-fly**. Just have to try yet again same time next year.

The Nats weekend to Whitby was tremendous fun and filled with all manner of magical opportunities to enjoy the natural world. Read all about it in Anne Reid's write up (page 14).

Summer arrived eventually and I was absolutely stunned to see images, posted on

the Flickr website, of a **robin** photographed fishing in a garden pond, catching and eating **newts**. How extraordinary, who would have thought it - fascinating behaviour. Jim and I joined moth enthusiast Paul Brooks and our own David Lampard for an overnight moth trapping session in Corrie Fee. What a great night and a new sighting for me - a **saxon**. It was quite exciting to be creeping around in the dark by torchlight in such an isolated place.

We joined daughter Pauline for a photography course which included visiting the island of Lunga with its amiable **puffins**, **shags**, **razorbills** and **guillemots**. What a fantastic experience led by Philip, an enthusiastic tutor. A day on a private charter boat off Skye had us all ecstatic with the sightings - **sea eagles**, **dolphins**, bioluminescent **comb jellies**, **seals**, **basking sharks**, diving **gannets** and all manner of other seabirds. A day never to be forgotten. Returning home we stopped off at Glasdrum Woods to look for **chequered skipper butterflies**, without luck, but as compensation, were delighted to see several **small pearl-bordered fritillaries** feeding on **thistles**, and a tiny, beautiful **white-spotted sable moth**.



**Bee-fly on forget-me-not**

Then off to Dorset, for our annual three weeks camping, which never disappoints, whatever the weather. Having talked to the Nats on 'Dorset Delights' in December, I won't repeat here, apart from a quick mention at how thrilled I was to finally get a glimpse and quick photo of the **long-eared bats** and also the chance to hold a **smooth snake**.

Barry Buddon Open Day's highlight for me was a male **woodwasp** - a huge **sawfly** - which someone had found in their garden and brought with them for interest. A wonderful creature and completely harmless, though quite intimidating by size and colouring. We returned to the area later in the week to dogwalk and watched an **owl** out in daytime being harried by **gulls**.

The fungi season seemed to arrive early, though the autumn was on the dry side. As well as finding the **false morel** in the spring, Jim spotted the rare **pouched false morel** in Tentsmuir and also an **earpick fungus** growing on a buried cone. While doing a recce for 2014, I was also delighted to find yet another rare and infrequently recorded specimen at Lady Mary's Walk - **pink disco fungus**. Hopefully we will re-find this one when we do the walk. All confirmed by microscopy from Liz Holden, mycologist, Grampian Fungus Group. Angus and Tayside seem to be the only areas in Scotland which don't have their own fungus group unfortunately.

Our autumn break took us once more across to the west coast where we rented an isolated cottage for a week, complete with its own roaring **red deer** stag in the garden which Jim photographed. We were aware that it also had resident **pine martens**, habituated to humans, which expected a variety of food to be put out on the windowsill. We duly obliged with a constant supply and were rewarded by appearances every evening, most frequently by the male - nicknamed Bob (Bob Marten!!). Bob had rakish battle scarred looks and a broken canine, whereas the female and one of the well grown kits had more delicate features. The visitors' books had records of Bob going back at least seven years, so quite a character. They expected jam, egg or peanut butter sandwiches, raw eggs in shell, nuts and custard creams, as per instructions left on the worktop. The cottage didn't have TV, but then who needs one with so much **marten** action.

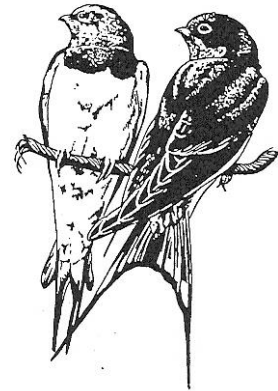
Jim and I had further photography outings with tutor Philip, who took us into Glen Etive. I was amazed to hear a **cuckoo** calling, this being October, but Philip assured me this was a **jay** imitating. I don't think I'm ever going to believe my ears again what with the **starlings** and now **jays** mimicking others. A fabulous day with Philip, who carefully researches the natural history in the area to provide photo opportunities without unduly disturbing the wildlife. The fact that it rained actually added more interest to the day than I would have thought. Before leaving Kylesbeg we noted a solitary **swallow** still flying round the cottage on 12th October, the latest I've seen one.

On our return, I was keen to check out all my regular haunts to catch up on fruiting fungi and was joined again by fellow enthusiast Davie. We were delighted to find many specimens of white, convoluted **saddle fungus**, *Helvella crispa* on St Vigean's Nature Trail and also a huge beautiful **wood blewit**, all left intact for others to enjoy! On then to Crombie to photograph **jelly tooth** and a most fascinating purple *Nectriopsis violacea* growing on **yellow slime mould** *Fuligo septica* which had formed round a **bracken** stem. Our last port of call was to the LNR and the Rock Garden at Broughty Ferry to see the different specimens of **earthstars**. Took a bit of searching, but we were well rewarded with good fresh examples.

Daughter Pauline visited and wanted photos of the waterfall at Arbirlot, swollen in spate. Even from the car park we could hear it as a raging torrent. Above the noise though we heard piercing whistles and before we knew it, were looking down on an adult **otter** with three **kits** fishing at the base of the waterfall. "Otterly delightful"? We were able to watch them from the bank only several feet away for nearly an hour as they were very excited and more intent on fishing, though they were aware of us. Pauline got excellent shots. Jim and I have revisited several times since but have not seen them again.

A visit to the butterfly overwintering site at Lunan had **small tortoiseshells**, **peacocks** and a **herald moth**, but still no **commas** hibernating. Under a piece of bark on the ground we found a dormant queen **common wasp**, all tucked up for the winter with her wings folded delicately beneath her body for protection.

As winter gradually set in, we took ourselves into Glenshee hoping for **mountain hares**, but still no sightings, never mind photos. However we did spot **eagles**, both **golden** and **sea**, **deer**, both **red** and **roe**, **red grouse** and **red-legged partridges**. We stopped in the car park for the **snow buntings**, whereupon a thick and freezing fog descended which decidedly reduced visibility and put



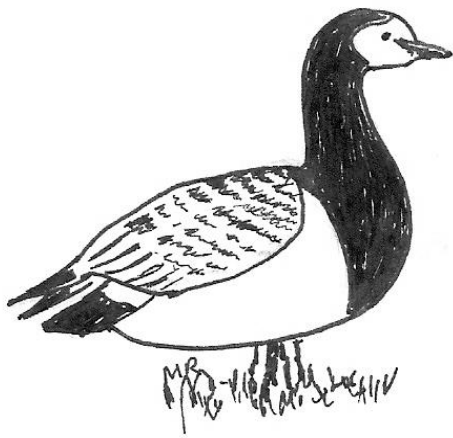
an end to our **hare** spotting for the day. Nothing left for it but to retire to the roaring fire of the Spittal of Glenshee hotel for some sustenance!

I bumped into Ranger Lisa at Crombie for our last walk of the year and was delighted to be given a twig with a **hazel gloves** fungus on it, which she had picked up on her mother's driveway in Mull. What a brilliant Hogmanay gift, a lovely way to end the year.

Well that's more than enough Rambles for 2013. It's been a very full and enjoyable year indeed, but lots more promised for 2014. Will THIS be the year of the **emperor moth**? Watch this space!

Stevie Smith

## DELIGHTS OF WINTERING GEESE IN DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY



Mid-March was bitterly cold at the Caerlaverock (WWT) Reserve, but the conditions were excellent for watching **whooper swans** at close range, along with **mallard, wigeon, shoveler** and **tufted duck**. The star performers however were the 5,000 or so **barnacle geese** that fly each winter from Svalbard, to the north of Norway, and Greenland and groups of **pink-footed geese** feeding on local fields. The abundance of spilled seed left near the hides attracted small flocks of **yellowhammers** and **finches**. The only disappointment was that the sub-zero temperatures had frozen the marshes so that waders were scarce during this visit.

Round at the near-by Mersehead RSPB Reserve we saw **pintail duck, shelduck, wigeon, teal** and **shoveler**, and **snipe, heron, ringed plover, tree sparrow** and more **barnacle geese**.

A visit to this area could not omit the Ken-Dee Marshes (RSPB) Reserve, and Alban Houghton and I were suitably rewarded by great views of **red kite** scanning the territory from above, and a flock of about 30 **Greenland white-fronted geese, Canada geese** and **greylag geese** feeding on farm land near the Marshes. Following an enjoyable woodland walk to the marsh-side hides, we had very close views of **nuthatch, great spotted woodpecker** and **great tits** on the peanut feeders, and a group of **bullfinches** in the old **willow** trees.

Brian Williamson

## A SORRY END

1st April

Rather sadly we found a dead **sea eagle** on one of our walks. It was on the roadside of the Collessie to Lindores Loch road, and therefore very close to the east coast release area. At this point the Ladybank to Perth railway line is adjacent to the road and it was pure luck we saw it as it was at the foot of the fence between road and railway. I had already passed without seeing it but Adam did. It appeared undamaged from what we could see and its wing tags were red with the number '2'.

I reported it to Rhian (RSPB) and she found and retrieved it the next day. It is now being examined at Perth Agricultural College. She thought it in good condition, a two year old male and from the Fife project. Apparently on the continent quite a few are killed by trains as they spot carrion and then they themselves also get hit. Some of the Scottish released birds have also been killed by trains - their take-off is too cumbersome to get out of the way in time. We have photos on our mobile and I now own a feather of a variety Clare did not produce at the AGM!

Liz Olejnik

## WATER VOLES ON ISLANDS

A 'Coast' programme on BBC television in April brought to our attention the fact that our Honorary President, Gordon Corbet, had been instrumental in identifying the presence of **water voles** on isolated Scottish islands, and in initiating research on these isolated populations. At the time (mid 1960s), Gordon was Curator of Mammals at the Natural History Museum in London and had heard a rumour of **rats** on the small island of Coreisa in the Sound of Jura. Acting on instinct he felt this worthy of investigation and discovered the isolated population of **water voles**. More recent research has revealed populations of water voles on six small islands in the area.

As there is no running water on Coreisa the voles have adopted a lifestyle more like that of **moles**, making extensive burrows and eating roots and shoots. The population may have arisen from the introduction of a single pregnant female so problems associated with inbreeding might be expected. This does not appear to be the case and genetic studies show that although the voles are all related the population appears stable and thriving. Matt Oliver and Stuart Pierny of Aberdeen University are continuing studies into the voles, which may have implications for the conservation of isolated populations of other endangered species elsewhere.



Anne Reid

## THE GREAT SKUAS ON HANDA ISLAND

A first visit in the middle of May to Handa Island (SWT Reserve) on the west coast of Sutherland on a very windy day brought many treats, especially considering the lateness of this spring. On the choppy 20 minute crossing from Tarbet on the ferry (an open RIB) we saw **black guillemot, fulmar, greater black-backed gulls, herring gulls** and a few **gannets**.

We were landed on a shingle beach, off-loaded along a portable walk-way by SWT volunteers and taken for an introduction to the Island and its management. We were given strict instructions about keeping to the extensive board-walk constructed around the reserve to protect ground-nesting birds, and for our own safety, especially when the path comes close to high cliffs. Soon after we left the landing site we became aware of the patrolling **great skuas**, the dreaded '**bonxies**', which came close, but did not really threaten us. Although it was mid-May they still were only establishing nesting territories. In a sheltered bay on the south coast we watched a **great northern diver** near to the shore, and were pleased to see aerial displays and hear drumming of roding **snipes** across a marsh with wind-trimmed **willows**. This relatively sheltered area of the island also showed a pair of aggressive male **cuckoos** and **hooded crows** harrying a **buzzard**. There were plenty of **meadow pipits**, too, and their nests are a favourite target for the **cuckoos**.

**Wheatears** had also arrived and were often flying ahead of us as we progressed along the board-walk to the west side of the island. To our surprise the high cliffs and stacks still held very few **guillemots, razorbills** and **fulmars**, perhaps because of the late spring, but at least we spotted a lone **puffin** amongst **thrift** on the flat-topped stack swept by an increasing gale. The ride back to Tarbet was rather exciting against the stiff wind and changed tide! This SWT Reserve is a gem, and the volunteers that construct and maintain the walk-ways provide a wonderful service for visitors.

Brian Williamson

## A SCREECH AT BREAKFAST

11th June

While breakfasting, just before 8.00 am, I heard a strange call, high pitched, almost but not quite a screech. What on earth was that? Was it a bird? But it didn't sound like any British species.



The calls were coming from the tall **larch** trees in the park and I went over with the binos, to try to get a better view, but couldn't see a thing. Suddenly the bird broke from cover and quickly flew past. It was difficult to see but it appeared green and about the size of a **collared dove** but much slimmer, with narrow wings and an even narrower pointed tail. I think it was a **rose-ringed parakeet**.

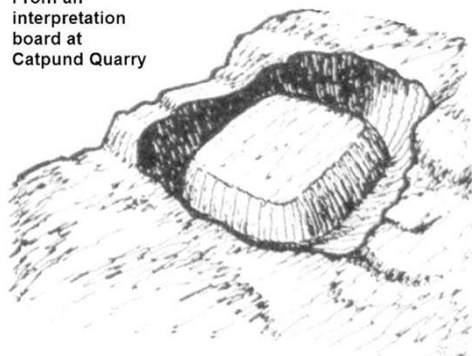
Jim Cook

## SHETLAND REVISITED

June 2013

In May 2000, I spent a wonderful Open University Geological Society week in Shetland, led by resident and OUGS member, Allen Fraser. It took me 13 years to return, this time with hubby Brian and fellow Nats Alban and Liz Houghton. During this time Shetland's rich and diverse geology, spanning almost three billion years, was awarded European Geopark Status, and the islands' archaeological sites, including the impressive preserved Jarlshof settlement and the Mousa Broch, are of international importance.

From an interpretation board at Catpund Quarry



We rented a beautifully appointed cottage near the small township of Vidlin. This central location was a perfect base for our whole day excursions to Unst, Fetlar and Eshaness. On our first day, having arrived early in Lerwick, following the overnight Northlink sea crossing on the excellent ship Hrossay, we visited nearby sites on the south of the main island.

The ancient **soapstone** quarry at Catpund Burn, where the Vikings carved out huge sink like containers from the rock in situ, seemed somewhat diminished since my last visit. Feeling rather guilty, I put this down to 'geological erosion', caused by visitors removing pieces of **soapstone (steatite)**, to take home as souvenirs; like

everyone else, on my previous visit I had taken a small piece of **steatite** to add to my specimen collection. However, Allen informed me later there had been a previous major flooding incident, which had caused the damage to the site. The colourful display of **moss campion**, observed on my previous visit was over, apart from a few remnant flowers, but a lovely display of **heath spotted orchids**, *Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum* and **spring squills**, *Scilla verna*, delighted us.

At Sumburgh, we braved the cold blustery weather to explore the carefully restored 4000 year old Jarlshof archaeological site, before heading back to Lerwick, where we spent a couple of happy hours perusing the exhibits in the excellent museum, followed by hearty hot lunches in the restaurant. The museum has a small tourist section where we picked up free leaflets and booklets for the Geopark trails and other attractions, as well as detailed information about Shetland's birds, flora and other wildlife.

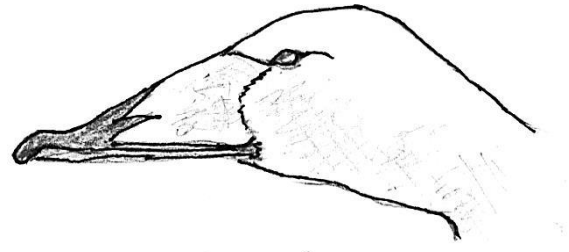
Visiting Unst from the main island involves two ferry crossings, firstly to Yell and then to Unst. My botanically minded companions were keen to visit the Keen of Hamar reserve, a bleak area of exposed **serpentinite** which supports a diverse flora including several very rare species. We found stunted specimens of **Edmondston's chickweed**, *Cerastium nigrescens*, **Norwegian sandwort**, *Arenaria norvegica*, and **northern rock cress**, *Draba norvegica*, all very rare UK species. (See photograph on page 23.) Brian was pleased to find three orchid species: **northern marsh**, *Dactylorhiza purpurella*, **heath spotted**, *Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum*, and **frog**, *Dactylorhiza viridis*, the latter very tiny but perfectly formed. Later, a hunt through the spoil heaps at the now derelict Nikka Vord **chromite** quarries, yielded plenty of rock specimens, assisted by helpful information boards with photographs of named ores and minerals.

A 'must see' for anyone visiting Shetland is the spectacular St Ninian's Tombolo, a 500 metre long strip of golden shelly sand separating two stretches of sea and joining St Ninian's Isle to the Mainland. There are quite a few **tombolos** in the Shetlands, but this one is the most famous and scenic. On a sunny day, we wandered around St Ninian's Isle, visiting the ruins of the chapel, admiring the wild flowers and nesting seabirds on the cliffs. As we crossed back towards the mainland we got super views of a pair of **black-throated divers**.

The glorious weather held for our visit to 'Shetland's volcano' at Eshaness, a wonderful scenic contrast of blue sky, drifts of pink **thrift** and dark volcanic cliffs. Parking beside the Eshaness lighthouse, the 'circuit' includes the famous 'storm beach' at Grind of Navir, where **ignimbrite** blocks, some more than two metres long have been hurled on to the top of the cliff by the power of the sea. I was amazed by the amount of erosion visible since my previous visit, 13 years earlier. I distinctly remembered our party scrambling down the cliff at Black Head of Breigeo, to examine the lavas, and I've got the photo to prove it. This area is now a precipitous sheer drop. My companions said we must have been bonkers! The blowhole at Kirn o'Slettans was quiet in the calm conditions; it only 'blows' during storms.

My companions, all very keen on ornithology, wanted to visit the island of Fetlar, where a small marshy area at Mires of Funzie is home to a few breeding pairs of rare **red-necked phalaropes** (See note on migration, below. Ed.). Our time in the hide failed to spot any of these rare waders, but as a consolation prize, a **whimbrel** was spotted flying overhead. About 80 pairs of **whimbrel** are known to breed on the island. The sun was shining and we headed to a nearby sandy beach for lunch and some sunbathing. A large noisy colony of sociable **bonxies (great skuas)**, were having a party nearby. Some more unexpected entertainment was provided by the appearance of some large Vikings in full regalia, who good naturedly allowed themselves to be photographed. They were there as part of a Countryfile BBC programme on Shetland, featuring Fetlar, including some excellent footage of the **phalaropes**. Later, on the Yell ferry crossing, some other 'twitchers' informed us gleefully that their hours in the hide had been rewarded with good sightings of a mating pair of **phalaropes!** Ah well.

A number of **whooper swans** were observed in different locations and fishing **black guillemots** were commonly seen offshore. A single **swallow** was spotted in flight, apparently a very rare sighting on Shetland. **Fulmars** were nesting everywhere, including on road cuttings. They seemed unperturbed by human or motorised traffic.



Apart from the rarities at Keen of Hamar, other notable plants found included a rare form of **common spotted orchid**, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* ssp. *hebridensis*, growing amongst impressive stands of beautiful **yellow flag irises**, *Iris pseudacorus*, in the south of the main island. Clumps of flowering **thrift**, *Armeria maritima*, covered the cliffs and sea shores with frothy pink flowers. On a shingly beach, south of Eshaness, we encountered the rare **oyster plant**, *Mertensia maritima*, growing extensively on the pebbly shore, above the tide line. At this location we heard the **seals** singing; we sang back!! We found evidence of **otters**, but no sightings. We were informed that these iconic mammals could usually be observed at Vidlin harbour at dawn, at about 5.00am. No takers!

Our final day was spent in the south of the main island, prior to catching our ferry home from Lerwick. We encountered Allen, with a small group, beside the cliffs at Sumburgh, all intent on photographing the nesting '**tammie norries**' (**puffins**). Large interpretive boards are provided, with illustrations of all the different seabirds and sea mammals, including **orcas (killer whales)**, **dolphins** and **seals**.

All in all, a wonderful week and we are already planning to return soon. We were very impressed with all the museums and heritage centres, the interpretive boards at many of the locations, and the geo walls at Mavis Grind, Unst Heritage Centre and Funzie. Free leaflets and geology trails packs are available in the museums and heritage centres. The Unst and Eshaness trails can also be downloaded from the Shetland Geopark website at:-

<http://www.shetlandamenity.org/trails-and-exhibits>

Shetland Geopark Home page with links :-

<http://www.shetlandamenity.org/geopark-shetland>

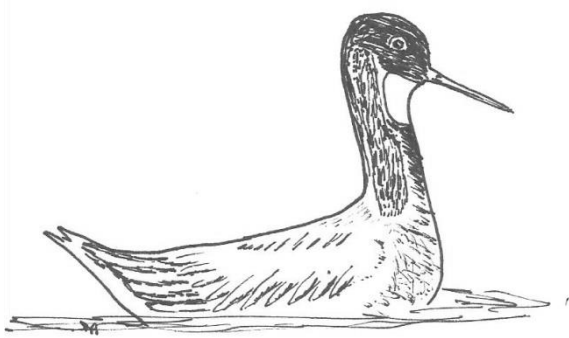
Allen Fraser now organises and leads excellent geo holidays and day excursions which can be booked via his Shetland Geotours website at:-

<http://www.shetlandgeology.com/>

Jenny Allan

## RED-NECKED PHALAROPE MIGRATION

A newspaper article in early January 2014 reported that the Shetland **red-necked phalaropes** migrate to the Pacific coasts of Ecuador and Peru via Greenland, Canada, Eastern USA and the Caribbean. They had been expected to join their Scandinavian and Russian cousins which are known to migrate to the Arabian Sea for the winter, but geolocator data surprised the researchers. This means that the birds are probably more closely related to the North American population of phalaropes which also winter in Peru and Ecuador. The 16,000 mile round trip is the second longest known bird migration, after that of the **Arctic tern** which goes from Arctic to Antarctic each year.



Anne Reid

## THRUSHES AND SNAILS

June and July

The 25th of June was a warm day and the back door was slightly ajar when a soft tap-tapping-scrunching-squashing sound attracted my attention. Peering through the crack in the door, I could see a **song thrush** busily beating laldy out of a large and juicy **snail** on the back door-step. The bird didn't notice me and I left it in peace to its dinner. There'd been a number of broken shells on the hard path earlier and, when counted, showed that the bird or birds had dealt with at least 32 of the blighters - all large **garden snails** (*Helix aspersa*). Perhaps the wet summers in '11 and '12 have increased the numbers of snails - there certainly seem to be many more of them - and in turn the improved food supply and the better weather has led to an increase in the numbers of these songsters.

Later, in mid-July, although I'd seen no **thrushes** in the garden during the last few weeks, there was further fresh evidence of feeding on the still all-too-abundant **snails**. Broken shells littered the path at the quiet side of the house. I can only hope that the birds have had a good breeding season this spring and summer, and that there will be plenty more thrushes to help deal with my snails next year!

Has anyone else seen more **song thrushes** than usual this year?

Jim Cook

## AN ERUPTION OF WRENS

4th August

While walking the back path of Carsegowniemuir quarry near the eastern gate, I could hear a **wren** calling urgently. I thought that it just didn't like my presence, and didn't pay any particular attention. I'd just walked past one of our refurbished bird boxes, open-fronted 'box 2', when a slight movement caught the corner of my eye. I paused to look, about 4m from the box, when there was a boiling eruption of five or six small brown shapes - fledgling **wrens**! Great, by this time of year it must have been a second brood. One of the tiny brown mites, no longer than my thumb, landed in the branch just above my head and peered down at me for a moment or two. Then, at the continued urging of its parent, the little bird took off and dived into deeper cover. I took off as well, to leave them in peace, but it had been a wonderful moment to see the quivering balls of feathers and fluff at such close range. An hour or so later I was back at that end of the quarry and took the opportunity to

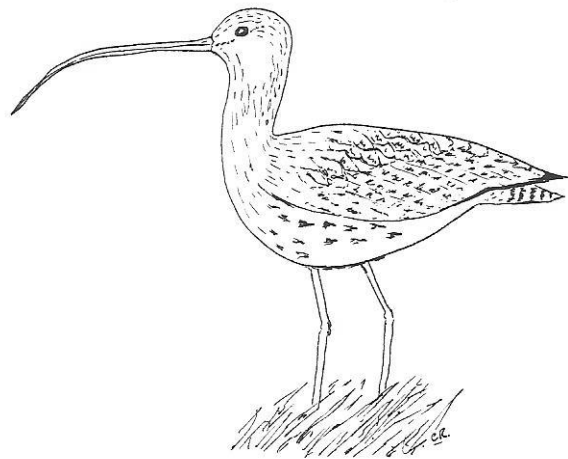
inspect the box again, this time through binoculars from a distance, and was gratified to see an adult wren zoom into the box. It was good to see that they had taken up residence again. I wonder whether they had nested there, but surely not.

Jim Cook

## TENTSMUIR

22nd October

During a two hour walk starting from Tayport and walking initially along the shore before doing three more sides of a square, I saw **redshank**, **curlew**, **oystercatcher** and about 50 **shelduck** all paddling about in the mud. As I turned into the woods my dog Missy set off after something interesting. This turned out to be a **red squirrel** which escaped safely up a **Scots pine** and then sat chattering at us crossly. We immediately also saw a **great spotted woodpecker** flying from a nearby **pine**. High up in the tree tops was a lot of high pitched chatting and looking up I saw various **tits** and **goldcrests** which seem so restless as they constantly move through the foliage in their search for food. One or two **buzzards** soared overhead and, low down, **wrens** were busy in wood piles and calling to each other.



Walking down the last side of my square and adjacent to farmland on the edge of the forest, I firstly heard and then saw my first **fieldfares** of the winter, originally down in the field but, disturbed by me, they flew up into the tree tops for safety. At this point I heard what was undoubtedly a **raven** across the field but failed to see it. Although I haven't seen them there before I suppose they move about and I do know that a pair nested and reared young this year for the first time not far from Tayport. On my way back along the shore a large flock of little birds flew up from the grasses next to the shore, circled around and settled again. They turned out to be **goldfinches** and I have never before seen such a large charm - there were at least 200 - quite wonderful. Lastly a pair of **stonechats** flew in and settled on the fence before heading off again. I was particularly pleased to see them as they used to be seen often along the edge of the dunes but I hadn't seen any for a long time.

Liz Olejnik

## GREEN WOOD CUP

11th November

I found the vivid blue-green fruiting bodies of this fungus on a fallen branch in woodland near Killiecrankie. Though apparently not uncommon, I had never seen them before and found that they could be one of two very similar species - *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* or *C. aeruginosa* - which are only distinguishable reliably by microscopic examination of the spores.

These 5mm fungi are also known as **green elf cups**, but to cabinetmakers they are the **green-stain fungus**. In addition to the vividly coloured fruiting bodies the fungus stains its wood host in a similar colour and this was used in some intricate inlaid designs on furniture and decorative items. Often found on **oak**, the stained wood is found much more often than the fruiting bodies.

Jack Moody

## ROOF-NESTING OYSTERCATCHERS

### Request for Information

If anyone knows of oystercatchers nesting on a roof anywhere in the local area, either this summer or in recent years, would you please let me have details. There is a researcher in Aberdeen who is collecting records of roof-nesting birds and he has asked if I know of any locally. This arose when I spotted one of his colour-ringed birds in Arbroath in January 2014 and reported it to him. It had been ringed in Aberdeen in 2012. Please send any records to me at [acmc.reid@virgin.net](mailto:acmc.reid@virgin.net) or give me a written record on one of our outings. Thank you.

Anne Reid.



Oystercatcher nest by Anne Burgess  
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