

Spring 2013 NEWSLETTER



Image by Mike Sutcliffe

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Chairman's News

I am not sure how many of us have realised that 2013 is the Year of Natural Scotland and that the Scottish Wildlife Trust has big plans to celebrate it by protecting our fantastic wildlife and wild places for the benefit of present and future.

SWT has decided to invest in a number of big projects in 2013 and, excitingly for us, this includes the Red Moss of Netherley near Stonehaven, where the raised bog will be restored by putting in over 30 small dams to keep the bog wet; ensuring that the bog continues to be a carbon store and provides habitat for insects, amphibians and birds such as snipe and long eared owls. SWT are encouraging visitors to look out for evidence of the pine martens which Nick and Rose, the convenors, spotted on the camera traps at Red Moss during last year. There are a number of other high profile projects being announced for SWT reserves and look out for the many events to be hosted by SWT and SNH, amongst others, during 2013.

I was pleasantly surprised to have red squirrels return to my garden near Stonehaven last summer after an absence of about 20 years. I have heard similar stories from others in lower Deeside and in Aberdeen itself and I think this demonstrates the real difference the SWT red squirrel project has made in Aberdeenshire in the last few years. SWT are now considering how to maintain this momentum on several fronts and are drafting a 30 year plan to do this. We have invited Steve Willis, the local red squirrel officer, to tell us about the achievements of the project in a winter lecture. He is also leading a walk in September in Gight Woods when he will put up a trail camera, which we will check at the end of the walk.

Finally, could I remind members to provide us with their email addresses? We would like to email out the newsletter to those of you happy to receive it in this format. It would help us to reduce our costs if we could email out as many as

possible. If this is something you are happy to do please send us your email address, with your name and address so we can cross-check against our records, to the following email address:

swtaberdeenmember@btinternet.com I can assure you this information will not be used for any other purpose. Don't worry – for those who like real paper in their hands we will continue to deliver it to you that way.

Roger Owen - Chair Aberdeen Member Centre

Update from the Reserves Manager

Red Moss of Netherley

At the last SWT Council meeting it was agreed to go forward with seeking management agreements with the other landowners of the whole SSSI at Red Moss. I have since progressed things to varying stages with 4 of the 5 landowners. I would hope to report that at least some agreements are in place in my next report. This will allow us to manage the SSSI to a much better standard as we can block further drains currently leaking water out of the bog.

Nick Littlewood and Rose Toney have provided some very good images of badger, pine marten and deer from their camera trap project. They have also started a yellow rattle viability project on the access track to the reserve. The team from Dundee have been up and strimmed this track twice and have also erected a new wooden threshold sign.

Coulnacraig Meadow

The meadow was cut and raked at the end of August by the team from Dundee.

Gight Wood

I have been struggling to find contractors willing to take on the woodland work at this reserve. We continue to carry out Site Safety Inspections and I am happy to report there have been no major problems. I am meeting with a contractor who is willing to take on path maintenance both here and at Longhaven Cliffs next week. Vicki Anderson, who works for RSPB at Strathbeg, and is also an SWT member has kindly volunteered to help us out her local reserve at Gight. Vicki is trained in many aspects and will be able to take on small emergency tasks for us.

Longhaven Cliffs

Unfortunately, the main thing to report here is that since installing the level walking surface along the full length of the reserve, we have suffered some vandalism to our new Interpretation Boards and dumping along the quarry track and our car-park is on the increase. Our Convenor, Dr Mark Young is aware of the situation and will report any further events to myself.

As always I am happy to answer any questions. It is easiest to contact me at rpotter@swt.org.uk

Rab Potter
Reserves Manager North East

Wildlife adventures around the Firth of Lorn



Last year, Sealife Adventures kindly donated a 5 hour wildlife watching boat trip to the Scottish Wildlife Trust Aberdeen which was given as a prize for thinking up novel ideas for recruiting new members to the group. I was lucky enough to be given the prize and booked the trip for the beginning of 2012; however after a long drive to Oban the sea was too rough to set sail and we made our way back home. Determined to take advantage we tried again for my Birthday in September and, with my Dad in tow, we made our way to Oban.

We travelled across to Oban the day before the trip which, considering that my Dad had only ever been to Scotland once before (Edinburgh for a weekend break), was an adventure in itself. We based ourselves at the beautiful Oban Caravan Park which I would highly recommend, particularly because of their resident Hollywood star; Russell Crowe (who was actually a rook). Russell makes the rounds every morning, usually as you are eating and he sat on the car door as we were packing up the car.



We arrived at Clachan Seil (just down the road from Oban), the boat launch site at 10am. David Ainsley, the experienced chartered skipper of 'Porpoise II', the Sealife Adventures boat, was there to meet us with his assistant Sarah. Both were very welcoming and, as we were given instructions on how



(not) to use the toilets, we all got geared up with waterproofs and binoculars; the excitement was building!



As we left Clachan Seil we passed the Ballachuan Hazelwood, a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve. The woodlands cover a low ridge overlooking Cuan Sound and are well known for their diverse lichen, bryophyte and fungal communities as well as the large heronry.



We travelled out in to the stunning Firth of Lorn, where the weather was fine and the sky clear. The Firth is a Marine Special Area of



Conservation and has been designated for its rocky reef habitats. The reefs host some of the most diverse communities in UK and Europe. The areas of outstanding natural beauty contain a number of uninhabited islands, known as the Slate Islands (The Islands that Roofed the World). These islands are surrounded by nutrient rich oceanic waters. As well as its rich biodiversity the Firth is also steeped in history, with Early Christians Saint Brendan and Saint Columba founding

a monastery on Iona and on Holy Isle in the Garvellachs. The group of islands lie within the Inner Hebrides, north of Jura and southwest of Oban. The main islands are Seil, Easdale, Luig, Lunga, Shuna, Torsa and Belnahua, and Scarba and Kerrera. The islands were quarried for Dalradian Slate in 1630 and again at the beginning of the 20th century producing more than 8 million slates a year. Quarrying was so intense in some areas that one island was mined so deep that eventually, only the rim of the island was left, and most of the land has now been swept away.



We sailed around the beautiful islands and were lucky enough to see cormorants, shags, black backed gulls, common seals, wild deer, a golden

eagle, a female hen harrier, osprey, gannets, harbour porpoise and most excitingly the amazing sight of a juvenile white tailed eagle. We managed to get some great photos as the young bird stuck around on the rocks for a while, despite being mobbed by hooded crows. After leaving the eagle the weather took a turn for the worse and we were glad for the waterproofs that Sarah had dished out earlier. As the rain fell and the waves picked up, we sipped on some welcome and warming hot chocolates and approached the Gulf of Corryvreckan - the site of the World's third largest whirlpool. The swirling high waves were impressive, if a little terrifying. As we manoeuvred around it, David told us of the fascinating tale of Breakan, a Scandinavian Prince who fell in love with the princess of the island. To prove his worth to the father of his beloved the prince agreed to show his courage by anchoring his boat in the whirlpool for three days and three nights. Breakan was said to have survived the first two nights, however the gales of the third night broke the anchor rope and the boat was



pulled under by the currents of the whirlpool. Only one crewman and Breakan's dog were said to have survived and Breakan's body was buried in the King's Cave. As we sailed away from the whirlpool and back towards Clachan Seil, I was slightly relieved we were moving away from the churning pool and back to calmer waters.

As we returned to the dock, slightly soggy than when we left, we could hardly believe that 5 hours had passed but, true to its name, it was indeed an adventure and, one that Chris, Dad and I will not forget any time soon. David and Sarah have a



wealth of knowledge and really made for an interesting and enjoyable trip; I recommend Sealife Adventures to you all!

Written by Hollie Walker (walker.hollie@gmail.com)

Photographs Copyright to Hollie Walker

www.sealife-adventures.com www.obancaravanpark.com

www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserve/balachuan-hazel-wood

Spongebob Squarepants and Other New Species - Bob Daly

Following on from the recent Oscars, it is time to see who won the biodiversity equivalent for 2012. Each year a university in Arizona runs a competition to

select the top ten most interesting 'new-to-science' species as voted for by an international panel of scientists. I think I should add that these species accounts, given in no particular order, are fact rather than fiction:

1. The Spongebob Squarepants Mushroom is a sponge-like mushroom with sponge-like spores. It looks like a sponge, squeezes like a sponge and bounces back like a sponge and goes under the Latin name 'Spongiforma squarepantsii'. Who says Latin is dead? It is an orange/pink colour and is only the 2nd member of the Spongiforma genus which is a type of Bolete fungus. It is found in the Lambir Hills on Sarawak, Borneo and lives in pineapples. It's no wonder it is described as smelling 'fruity' – I think I would if I lived in a pineapple. The name was initially rejected as 'frivolous' but, fortunately, the authors won out.
2. The Bonaire Banded Box Jelly (*Tamoya ohboya*) isn't something you would serve up at a childrens birthday party – however much you might be tempted – but a venomous jellyfish from the island of Divi Flamingo in the Dutch Antilles off the north coast of Venezuela. With a transparent (or is it blue) body and four white and orange-striped tentacles it is described as being 'strikingly beautiful'. It has been known of for the past ten years but only became 'official' after a specimen was captured in 2008. A competition was launched to name it and was won by someone who thought 'Oh Boy' would be the typical exclamation by a swimmer coming into contact with it and its seriously stinging tentacles. I suspect it has other names.
3. The Nepalese Autumn Poppy (*Meconopsis autumnalis*) is a species of Himalayan Poppy which has escaped detection until now. Most *Meconopsis* species which are planted in our gardens come in various shades of blue, yellow and red and this a rather nice, large flowered, pale yellow one. No doubt it will become a 'must have' for keen gardeners in the coming years. It had been collected twice before in recent decades but not recognised as a new species. It grows in the remotest parts of Nepal (in the Langtang region due north of Katmandu) and flowers at the height of the monsoon season so finding it can't have been the most comfortable of experiences. Clearly botanists have their feet on the ground when it comes to naming species, albeit between 11000 and 14000 feet high.
4. The Wandering Leg Sausage (*Crurifarcimen vagans*) is a six-inch long, orange millipede from the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania. It has 224 legs on its 56 body segments (2 pairs per segment) give or take a few, and with a body diameter of 1.5 cms its name seems rather appropriate (the common name is a literal translation of the Latin name – 'farcimen' is Latin for 'sausage' in case you didn't know). The Eastern Arc Mountains in the

NE of the country are apparently a biodiversity hotspot and this is the largest millipede to be found there. The Giant African Millipede beats it for size at 15 inches and should clearly be renamed as the Cumberland Sausage Millipede – just be careful if you are ever having a BBQ out there.

5. The Sneezing Monkey (*Rhinopithecus strykeri*) is a black snub-nosed monkey with a white beard and was given its name because of its habit of sneezing whenever it rains. Indeed, it even tries to avoid rainwater entering its turned-up nose by sitting with its head between its legs. It lives in the high mountains of Burma/Myanmar and was found when local villagers told scientists to look for it, or rather listen for it, when it was raining. I was surprised to learn that an average of 36 new species of mammal are discovered each year – mostly bats and small furry things I suspect. New primate species are few and far between with the exception of the lemurs which seem to keep subdividing.
6. The only European species to make the top ten is a tiny dive-bombing wasp from Spain (*Kollasmosoma sentum*) which, like many other wasps, lays its eggs in ants, which form the food source for the wasp larvae. The interesting part is the speed at which it operates. Cruising along 1 cm above the ground it dive bombs onto its prey and lays an egg inside the ant with its ovipositor in just 0.052 seconds. Ants do take evasive action by turning upside down and waving their legs in the air if they see it coming but they obviously need quick reaction times.
7. Sazima's Tarantula (*Pterinopelma sazimai*) is an iridescent blue spider from Brazil. It has been named after the zoologist who first collected it back in the 70s and 80s – I can only assume it wasn't identified as a new species at the time as there are other blue tarantulas. It lives on the tabletop mountains (tepui) close to the Atlantic side of the country where there are very localised weather conditions (wet) and soil types so its distribution is extremely limited.
8. There is a new British species included – of sorts. The Night-blooming Orchid (*Bulbophyllum nocturnum*) grows on New Britain Island which lies between Papua New Guinea (of which it is part) and the Solomon Islands. Of the 25000 known orchid species this is the first which has flowers which come out after dark, opening around 10pm and closing the next morning. They only last one night. Thinking about it this is rather a good strategy when you realise how many night-flying insects there are so I wonder why there aren't more flowers doing it? It is also unique in another sense, there being only a single known specimen – I guess that makes it the rarest plant in the world. It may become even rarer as it's under threat from logging and

- as it was first described in a paper entitled 'Nocturne for an unknown pollinator' I'm guessing they don't yet know what insect species they have to protect to ensure it gets pollinated. In appearance it has three yellowy green petals/sepals, a pinkish slipper hanging down and several white 'tentacles' dangling from the centre (more like plant roots than Spongebob).
9. The Devil's Worm (*Halicephalobus mephisto*) is a 0.5 mm long nematode, which is the deepest-living, terrestrial, multi-cellular organism ever found. It was discovered 1.3 km down in a South African gold mine where it has to survive huge pressures and 37 degree C temperatures. Studies showed that the borehole water it was living in had not been in contact with the atmosphere for between 4000 and 6000 years. Scientists are interested because of the implications for searching for life on other planets. If you want to find it then the address you need is Shaft 3, Level 26, Corridor 28, Beatrix Gold Mine, SA.
 10. Finally, the Walking Cactus (*Diania cactiformis*). This 6cm long 'worm' with it's 10 pairs of legs won't be doing any more walking as this is a fossil find from 500 million year old rocks in China and looks more like the skeletonised frond of a fern than an animal. The age tells us that it must have lived in the sea as nothing came out until 100 million years later. It belongs to the extinct group called the Armoured Lobopodians. The only remaining ordinary Lobopodians are the Velvet Worms which come in a range of colours – including bright blue – and eat insect's inners while they are still alive. The Walking Cactus has segmented legs, a significant fact because it adds weight to the theory that the Lobopodians are the ancestors of all modern arthropods (insects, spiders, crustaceans).

If you want to see pictures or videos of these, or those from previous years, then check out the website: <http://species.asu.edu/Top10>.



The Year of Natural Scotland is well underway and, as part of a year of exciting projects, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is undertaking a poll to identify Scotland's favourite wildlife.

The project is called Scotland's Big 5. Experts at SNH will imminently reveal which they think are Scotland's five favourite wildlife species. SNH hasten to add that the experts' choice might not be everyone's choice and so the public will be invited to vote for their favourite too. SNH will also invite the public to join in the Big 5 debate – to share just why their favourite should top the poll!

Big 5 plants and trees

Inspired by SNH's campaign, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has decided to champion biodiversity and launch its own vote for Scotland's Big 5 plants, trees and shrubs. Just asking around RBGE, it seems that everyone has differing opinions:

Chris Ellis, Head of the Cryptogam section, selected these lichens, mosses and liverworts as his Big 5:

Usnea dasypoga

Sphagnum spp.

Anastrophyllum donnianum

Degelia cyanoloma

Fulgensia bracteata



Conservation Officer Heather McHaffie, picked the following as her Big 5:

Scottish primrose *Primula scotica*

Newman's lady fern *Athyrium distentifolium* var. *flexile*

Woolly willow *Salix lanata*

One-flowered wintergreen *Moneses uniflora*

Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*



Article courtesy of RBGE from the Botanic Issue 52 Spring 2013.

Images: © Mike Sutcliffe. For more information:

SWT: <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/> SNH: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/>

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh: <http://www.rbge.org.uk>

AGM

Just a reminder that the AGM is on Thursday 18th April at the Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen commencing at 7:30 followed by a talk by Glenn Roberts from NESBReC: "Which species should I record & where should I send my records?" We do need new committee members; please think about helping with Member Centre organisation. Any nominations should be sent to Roger Owen as soon as possible.

Summer Outings 2013

Sunday 19th May 10:00am to 4:30pm

Amphibian & Reptile Workshop

Friends of Angus Herpetofauna

Meet at The James Hutton Institute, Macaulay Drive, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen

Packed lunch & stout footwear. **Booking essential.**

Further details/booking contact: Hollie Walker 07800 764184

Email: walker.hollie@googlemail.com

This event aims to help you to learn more about amphibian and reptile identification, habitat assessment, survey methods, survey protocols, recording, health & safety, licensing, and landowner permissions. The outing will be based outdoors for a couple of hours, so please come adequately prepared and with waterproofs. Limited spaces: 15 people maximum, first come first served. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

Saturday 15th June 10:15am

Botanical Outing with David Welch

Loch of Strathbeg

Meet at RSPB Centre at Starnafin Grid Ref NK057580

Packed lunch & stout footwear. **Booking essential.**

Further details/booking contact: David Elston 01224 868153

Saturday 20th July 10:30am to 4:00pm

Maiden Pink survey & walk with the Ranger

St Cyrus NNR

Meet in car park by the Old Lifeboat Station, St Cyrus

Packed lunch & stout footwear. **Booking essential.**

Further details/booking contact: Rodney Payne 01569 763742

Sunday 4th August 10:00am to 3:00pm

The Ecology of Caledonian Pinewood Spiders Workshop (open event)

British Arachnological Society & Glen Tanar Ranger Service

Meet Glen Tanar Visitor Centre, Glen Tanar, Aboyne

Packed lunch & stout footwear. **Booking essential.**

Further details/booking contact: Hollie Walker 07800 764184

Email: walker.hollie@googlemail.com

This event aims to help you to learn more about spider and harvestmen ecology around the Caledonian Pinewood edges of Glen Tanar. A guided walk will highlight a diversity of their ecological niches, foraging strategies and methods for finding them. You will also be given an opportunity to try sampling techniques to collect specimens to examine more closely under a microscope at

the end of the day to generate records for the Spider Recording Scheme. The outing will be based outdoors for a couple of hours so please come adequately prepared and with waterproofs. If you have any books on spider identification, bug-viewing pots, hand lenses, or a pooter, then you are welcome to bring these along also. Limited spaces: 15 people maximum, first come first served. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

Saturday 21st September 9.30-12.30pm
Red Squirrels with Steve Willis
Early morning walk in Gight Woods
Meet car park NJ832399, B9005 4km NW of Methlick
 Packed lunch optional and stout footwear
Booking essential
 Further details and booking contact: Roger Owen 01569 762479

Contacts for Members

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