

## SWT Aberdeen Newsletter Winter 2015

<http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/>

### Chairman's Thoughts

News of a second beaver kit this year at the SWT's Knapdale trial re-introduction site prompts me to wonder what our members think about bringing back long-gone species to Scotland. The Scottish Government are to make a decision on beaver re-introductions later this year and the Environment Minister will have to balance potential gains in biodiversity with any possible impacts beaver might have on habitats, other species and people. But what about other possible re-introductions? Strangely enough this approach to restoration of species is not new. Red squirrels were once almost extinct in Scotland and many re-introductions took place including animals from Scandinavia released at Dunkeld in 1793. Almost extinct fish species have been re-introduced, such as the Powan and Vendace, from outside Scotland and we all know about the great efforts to restore populations of sea eagle and red kite. It does seem rational to me to then consider when and how we might bring back other species. The European lynx, in particular, would appear to have huge potential benefits for controlling the 350,000 roe deer in Scotland, and so assisting natural regeneration of woodlands and, as it has done in Sweden, very significantly boosting tourism in areas where it has been established. Lynx have been re-established all over Europe with little problem for farming. The counter-argument is often made that Scotland is no longer wild enough for lynx. Do you think that is the case? I would be really interested to hear your views as SWT members, for and against further re-introductions of once indigenous species.

Unfortunately we had to cancel the July outing to the River Dee due to lack of numbers and this was disappointing for those who went out of their way to organise the event. The local committee have been trying to think of ways to better advertise the events and we have begun emailing details to our membership and producing posters. We would be grateful for any volunteers offering to put up posters for us on public noticeboards. Please let me know if you would like to receive copies of them. By the way, we would still love to hear from anyone willing to join the small rota of volunteers agreeing to serve up teas and coffees at the next series of winter talks beginning in October: [roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk)

*Roger Owen*

### Update From Reserves Manager – July 2015

#### Coulnacraig Meadow

The reserve was recently NVC'd by a contractor. We are awaiting final report; however her initial findings are promising. There appear to be plenty of orchids and five species in total. The meadow is due to be cut in August.

#### Gight Wood

There have been a few issues to deal with on this site, however on the whole the reserve is looking good. The footpaths are being maintained by a contractor, including replacing one section of boardwalk and spraying Giant Hogweed, of which there is not much thank goodness. We will also shortly be spraying any re-growth on the sycamore stumps which have been felled in the last two winters. Peregrines nested again this year.

We are looking at the footpath from the entrance at Gight castle down to Hagberry Pot bridge. This path can be quite slippery in wet or icy conditions, however, much of it is on, or just above bedrock and any improvements will be quite major, and costly.

#### Longhaven cliffs

Again footpath maintenance is being carried out by a contractor. Unfortunately we have been the victim of some vandalism to our interpretation boards and signs. There are ongoing discussions with a company called Northconnect, who are proposing to bring ashore an electricity cable from Norway.

#### Red Moss of Netherley

All the work funded through the Peatland Action Project (around £33,000) is now complete. This work included the removal of large areas of scrub from the bog and the damming of the main ditches which were draining the bog. A helicopter was used to transport materials onto the site thereby minimizing disturbance to the vegetation. These works seem to be working well.

A further £16,000 worth of tasks, provided by the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Bypass Mitigation Fund, is now in full swing. This will involve further damming and scrub removal work, along with the replacement of the wooden bridges

which span gaps in the old peat road. We now manage all but 18Ha of the SSSI as management agreements have now been signed with a total of three other landowners.

Our Convenors, Nick Littlewood and Rose Toney are providing valuable monitoring on site and have also provided opportunities for children from Lairhillock Primary School to (carefully!) visit the site as part of their studies. On my last visit they showed me a wonderful large colony of small pearl bordered fritillary butterflies

We are now at that time of year when I am busy planning budgets and work programmes for our reserves and staff in the North East for 2016. As always I am happy to answer any questions. It is easiest to contact me at

[rpotter@swt.org.uk](mailto:rpotter@swt.org.uk)

**Rab Potter - Reserves Manager North East**

### **A Trip to the Uists, June 2015.**

The party of 12 birders led by Russell Nisbet took the "Road to the Isles" on Sunday the 31st May. Overnighting in Uig on Skye, after breakfast we took the ferry to Lochmaddy in N Uist. Changeable weather meant wrapping well up to birdwatch on the trip across. Species seen were Black Guillemot, Manx Shearwaters, Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Arctic Skua, Bonxies and an assortment of gulls. No cetaceans, a disappointment!

Arriving in blustery, chilly weather, we boarded our bus and drove south to Benbecula where we stayed in the aptly named Benbecula House Hotel. Stonechats, pipits and ducks were seen en route. Here we settled in to our rooms and met Martyn the local crofter who was to be our guide during our stay. The weather became a north-westerly gale with heavy rain and the ferry was cancelled for the evening but we still managed to birdwatch in the lee of the bus. Coot Loch (not the Gaelic name) gave us Coot, Little Grebe, Tufted Ducks, Mallard, Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Swallows, Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Lapwings, and some common gulls. Loch Mhor scored highly with three Red Necked Phalaropes, Snipe, Black-Tailed Godwits, Shoveller, Greylag Geese plus more of the same at Coot Loch. Over the causeway to S Uist near Martyn's croft and to North Bay which held huge flocks of Sanderling, many Dunlin and Ringed Plover, and summer plumaged Turnstone, plus waders already mentioned. Shelduck were next and while admiring them a stunning Glaucous Gull glided past close to us. We finished the day with Cuckoo, Collared Doves, and from the hotel dining room a Short-eared Owl.

Next day in windy, showery weather we set off North to a view point at Baleloan of a Golden Eagle's nest with one fluffy white chick. A group of folk had set up telescopes and a small display area and were guarding the nest and pleased to show the eagles to visitors. While the female eagle stayed close to the nest, the male circled around above us giving a tremendous display of its flying ability. Snipe and Wheatears were on site. Over the hill to Valley Strand, where we were overflown by two White-tailed Eagles and a dark phased Arctic Skua. Off the shore Great Northern Divers hunted while Arctic and Little Terns fluttered around. Rock Pipit, Buzzard, Curlew, Cormorants, Gannets, Red-breasted Mergansers and Eiders were also seen. A Whimbrel was heard together with Skylarks. Walking around the area through wet grassy moor areas gave us a few more, Greylag Geese, Sedge Warbler, Common Sandpiper, Starling, Linnets and more Short-eared Owls. A nice surprise on the way home was a hunting male Hen Harrier hunting over the peats on Destitution Road.

On Wednesday with much improved weather conditions we set off for Balranald the big RSPB reserve. Walking across the flat sandy terrain there were many feral Pigeons (good enough for Rock?) and Corn Buntings. Corncrake were heard, but not seen! We saw many of the species already mentioned the only new one being Curlew Sandpiper amongst hundreds of small waders on the heaps of seaweed. Further on we added Twite, Ravens and Red-throated Diver.

Final day already! Going back up the road to see the Red-necked Phalaropes again we managed four on this occasion. A fellow birder advised us of a Whimbrel at Stinky Bay and a quick drive gave us excellent views. New species was Bottle-nosed dolphins, two of which cruised past just off the rocks. Martyn led us to a small loch where Whooper Swan breed and we saw a pair with two cygnets. A complete change of habitat at Loch Aineort, a rich wooded area which gave us Dunnock, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Willow warbler and Wren.

The trip home in the boat started wet and as soon as we drew away from Lochmaddy the sun came out and all was beautiful. Nothing new in the bird line except for Storm Petrel seen by two of us. Superb views of a snow covered Ben Nevis saw us on our way home. Many thanks to Martyn and Russell Nisbet for a great trip. About 120 bird species.

*Rodney Payne*

### Stonehaven Wildlife Watch group June outing - SNH St. Cyrus

On Sunday 7th June the Wildlife Watch group visited SNH St.Cyrus visitor centre where we were given a very interesting talk about the bugs and beasties found on the reserve by Kym the assistant ranger. Following the indoor talk we headed onto the reserve to put into practice what we'd learnt using our butterfly nets and magnified observation jars.



Outdoors we found and were told about numerous types of the wild flowers & grasses but with the outings theme of bugs and beasties we concentrated on these finding several varieties of beetles, moths and other interesting flying species. While none are especially uncommon at St Cyrus the highlights of the afternoon was seeing several Early-purple Orchids plus being very close to nesting swallows with their chicks on the visitor centre building. But, because of their colourful wings the biggest highlight of the afternoon for the youngsters was finding Cinnabar moths. These feed mainly on ragwort a wild plant the reserve has been working hard to encourage on the reserve and is clearly paying off these days. The images show parents and youngsters enjoying the afternoon's activities.



### Raffle Prizes

The members centre runs a raffle at the winter meetings. Members kindly donate all the prizes, meaning that all the money raised goes to member centre funds. So if anyone would like to donate items for prizes for meetings this Autumn they will be greatly appreciated. Please hand them to any committee member if you have any suitable items.

### RSPB Friends of Strathbeg – Bird Food Sales

Latest prices and orders forms will be available to download from the SWT website: [www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/](http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/)

### Saving (Northeast!) Scotland's Red Squirrels!

Since its establishment in 2009 the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) team have been busy in northeast Scotland. Great progress has been made over the years with the establishment of grey squirrel control across the region and increasingly detailed survey and monitoring.

'We now have a clearer picture of grey squirrel distribution than ever before' said Project Officer, Steve Willis. Knowing where grey squirrels are living informs the work of the team of Grey Squirrel Control Officers who use live-capture cage traps to trap and remove the non-native grey.

'Captures in 2015 have been very high, likely due to the remarkable mast year in 2014 which produced vast amounts of natural food. The winter was kind to squirrels as well, so many greys survived that might not have made it otherwise.' Steve added.



What is good for greys is, generally speaking, also good for reds as well. As the competitive pressure of the grey squirrel is removed red squirrels are bouncing back. 'Red squirrel sightings in parts of Aberdeen are now becoming the norm, rather than the exception. From Culter to Cults reds are regular visitors to many woods and gardens, and Hazlehead appears to be teeming with red squirrels. A remarkable finding recently was the capture of a red squirrel adjacent to Seaton Park. It was released alive and well and reports have since come in from various parts of Old Aberdeen, presumably of the same animal' said Steve.

Funding is secured until Spring 2017 with some funding from the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route continuing well past this date. So what does this mean for the future of the red squirrel in the northeast? Will we succeed in eradicating the grey from the region? Will reds once again become a common sight throughout the city? Will the recovering pine marten population have the same impact on greys in Aberdeenshire as it had in Ireland? All interesting questions- and ones to which we hope (and believe!) the answer is a resounding 'YES'!

Far and away the simplest way you can help the project is recording your sightings on the SSRS website at [www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk)

To contact Steve email [swillis@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:swillis@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk) or call 01224 266526

**An important announcement about the Local Wildlife Watch Group Alan Belton – Stonehaven Wildlife Watch**

The Stonehaven Wildlife Watch Group is, like all other WW groups aimed at youngsters between ages of 8-14 years and has been running for almost five years. Two of the three existing leaders are regrettably unable to continue running the group after December 2015. Sadly this means it will have to disband unless two replacements can be found. We are therefore appealing to any adult SWT member in the Stonehaven area who is willing to take on a leader's role and see below to find out how they can help.

The closure of any Wildlife Watch group is highly undesirable but we do have an opportunity in that the newest Stonehaven WW leader actually lives in Aberdeen. Coincidentally the local SWT committee has been working towards the formation of a new Wildlife Watch group in the city for some time. If the Stonehaven group is forced to break up, early 2016 would clearly seem the most appropriate time to get this new Aberdeen group up and running. With such a large SWT adult membership in the locality it's astonishing there is not already a WW group in Aberdeen and we would like to invite anybody who is keen to become involved as a leader in either the existing Stonehaven group or forming a new Aberdeen group to contact us at [committee@swtaberdeen.org.uk](mailto:committee@swtaberdeen.org.uk) as soon as possible for more details.

If you have young family who are interested in outdoor activities and wildlife in general this is a wonderful opportunity for them (and you) to meet other like-minded people and to make new friends. Do not delay contacting the committee and the one thing we do promise is somebody will get back to about this you very soon.

**Indoor talks and outings for 2015/2016**

Indoor meetings take place at Main Lecture Theatre, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Tillydrone Ave, AB24 2TZ at 7.30 pm.

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015:** Red Kites - RSPB

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2016:** The World of Moles – Martyn Gorman

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> Feb:** Keeping Track of Birds in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Ian Francis RSPB

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> Mar:** Scottish Wildcats – Emma Rawling

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Apr:** AGM then Protecting Red Squirrels, Steve Willis

Local SWT website: [www.swtaberdeen.org.uk](http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk)

National SWT website: <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

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