

Spring 2011 NEWSLETTER



Scottish
Wildlife
Trust



Comma Butterfly Caterpillar



Sponsored by BP

Contents

Chairman's News	2 - 3
Update from The Reserves Manager	3 - 4
Volunteering Opportunities	4
Grampian Mammal Group	5
Saving our vanishing Wetlands	6
Peatlands Rise up the Agenda	7
Outing Reports & Articles	7 - 9
Summer Outings	11
Contacts for Members	12

Chairman's News

I really enjoy snowy weather and I am always interested in the prints left in the snow by wildlife visitors around my house at Rickarton: including the fox that crept around the entire house one afternoon passing under every bird feeder en route; tracks of several roe deer nibbling at shrubs; and even signs of tunnelling voles. So far, from late November until mid-January, I have already had 53 days of snow in my garden two miles from the Aberdeenshire coast and I don't remember anything like that in the 34 years I've lived in these parts.

Coming down from the hard packed snows of Dreish in Glen Clova recently I called in to the visitor centre there and received an infectiously enthusiastic welcome from Neil, the assistant ranger, who spent some time showing us lots of amazing pictures, including a young eagle and a pine marten, snapped by the camera trap they have installed. The Glen Clova visitor centre is well worth a visit!

I am really pleased that we now have two very keen and capable convenors in Nick Littlewood and Rose Toney for the SWT Red Moss of Netherley. Nick and Rose have been out already and are sending in very interesting reports, including their discovery of a Great Grey Shrike that had taken up residence in the moss. They are very keen to assist with reserve management, much to the delight of our reserves manager Rab Potter. I know Nick and Rose would be only too pleased to be contacted by any members wishing to know more about the reserve and its issues.

Please let me know and I'll pass on any messages to them:

roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk

In this edition you will see a couple of very significant articles on wetlands and their importance in general and specifically in the North East of Scotland. You might not have realised just how important wetlands are, not only for wildlife, but also for people. The NELBAP initiative to restore some wetlands in the North East is an ambitious and fascinating initiative for which I have high hopes.

Finally, I would like to welcome Hollie Walker on to the Member Centre Committee. Apart from her role as the SWT Squirrel Officer based in Aberdeen she has a very wide interest in wildlife and will be a terrific asset to us in bringing more of it to our local members. Note Hollie's piece on initiating a Mammal Society here in the North East of Scotland.

I am sure you will find much to interest you in this newsletter.
Roger Owen - Chair - Aberdeen MC

Update from the Reserves Manager

Rab Potter

Red Moss of Netherley

Myself and the local SNH Officer met with one of the other owners of the SSSI moss late last year. We were hoping to get a management agreement with this owner. However, this did not happen, but he has taken advice on the best way to manage his piece of the SSSI from us and we are hopeful of a good working partnership with him in the years to come. Both myself and SNH are still trying to persuade the other landowners to show some interest.

We have been very lucky to find a new Convenor for the reserve – well two actually! Nick Littlewood and Rose Toney are our new convenors. Nick works for the Macauley Institute and is leading a team on a review for the IUCN UK Peatland programme. On their first visit to the site they recorded a Great Grey Shrike – a first for this reserve! Mike Stevens continues to read dipwells and carry out routine maintenance on the reserve.

Gight Wood

Our funding application to the Scottish Rural Development Programme is now in its final stages and we are hopeful of starting work on this project

this coming year. This will include felling non-native trees, fencing and some bracken control.

Longhaven Cliffs

Mike Stevens and his volunteers have started work on the new cliff-top footpath, and work is progressing well. The section to be completed by a contractor had a bit of a hiccup. The original contractor went out of business. However, we have now appointed a new contractor and work on this section should be completed by April. Still occasional (unconfirmed) reports of Sea eagles around the reserve

Coulnacraig Meadow

Mike is carrying out annual work on the reserve as planned.

As always, I am happy to help with any information regarding the Aberdeenshire Reserves, or any other wildlife/SWT related issue. Probably easiest to reach me by e-mail.

My contact details are below:

Robert Potter
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Reserves Manager North East
The Kennels
nr Cortachy, by Kirriemuir

Angus DD8 4QE
Tel 01575 540396
Mob 07920 468568
e-mail rpotter@swt.org.uk

Volunteering Opportunities

Members are welcome to attend volunteer days held on the first Saturday of each month. Please contact Mike Stevens before the Thursday of the preceding week. Limited places are available for pick up from the Aberdeen area. Actual tasks to be carried out will be dependent on priorities at the time. Tel 01466 780164

Rab Potter is also keen to hear from members who can help by undertaking surveys on a regular basis during the summer months. This could be butterfly transects; bird; fauna; and flora surveys. You can help us whilst pursuing your own particular interests. Tel 01828 634205

Planning for Wildlife - Volunteers

Like all of us in SWT I am sure you, our members, are very keen to ensure that we provide as much protection and opportunity for wildlife as possible. One really effective way to do this is to ensure that plans for development take account of

biodiversity; not only at designated sites, reserves and other protected hotspots, but also in the wider countryside which is especially important if we want to maintain viable populations of birds, insects, mammals and other wildlife. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to protect and improve biodiversity and they employ people to advise them in this duty. But SWT can have great influence by pointing out where development plans might have a detrimental effect on wildlife or, just as important, how changes to development plans can maintain biodiversity in urban and rural environments. I can assure you that local councils do pay attention to comments from SWT. By becoming a planning volunteer for your local Member Centre, we can comment most effectively. You will join a network of SWT planning volunteers, receive a lot of help and support and you will rapidly become very useful to both SWT and the Local Authorities. Please consider it – and let me know if you would like to volunteer by emailing me at: roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk. Roger Owen - Chair - Aberdeen Member Centre.

For more information please read SWT Planning Newsletter which is on our web site: <http://www.swtaberdeen.org.uk/Planning%20Newsletter%20Oct%202010.pdf>

Grampian Mammal Group

The Mammal Society works to protect British mammals, halt the decline of threatened species, and advise on all issues affecting British Mammals. We study mammals, identify the problems they face and promote conservation and other policies based on sound science



Grampian Mammal Group (GMG) is the first Local Scottish Mammal Society Group established in 2010, with a second Scottish Local Group starting this year.

GMG are currently assembling a team of **core members**; “professionals” involved in various aspects of mammal conservation in and around the Grampian region and recruiting **Society members**; people from all walks of life that share a common interest in the conservation and well-being of local mammalian fauna. We aim to attract all of those who are interested in local mammal research and management projects and volunteering opportunities therein.

The North East of Scotland, the Grampian region and surrounding areas, occupy a large area; home to a great diversity of mammalian species and is a hub for mammal (and many other) conservation, management and research projects. The main aims of the Grampian Mammal Group is to provide a link between these currently stand alone projects in order to increase the efficiency of such projects, but also and importantly, marry peoples’ interests, abilities and locations to the current conservation efforts in the region. This pooling of resources and shift towards a “multi species/community” approach is one which has so far been unexplored despite the obvious benefits.

Hollie Walker, Scottish Wildlife Trust's Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels North East (SSRS NE) Project Officer and her partner Chris Sutherland, who works with the University of Aberdeen on their water vole conservation project, will be managing the website, coordinating the network and responding to public enquiries. Sophie Eastwood is also helping them who is Scottish Wildlife Trust's SSRS NE Project assistant. Sophie will be editing the website.

GMG aim to collaborate with the local North East Biodiversity Record Centre and ensure all sightings, surveys and research are collated regularly by all projects, fed to the UK Mammal Atlas, National NBN database, and then shared across Europe.

To join or for more information please contact Hollie Walker Tel: 01224 266526 or email: grampianmammals@gmail.com

Saving our vanishing Wetlands

As many SWT members are already aware, Wetlands such as Loch of Lintrathen, near Kirriemuir, are an invaluable habitat for a host of species, both resident and migratory. These include several UK Biodiversity Action Plan species such as otter and water vole as well as wildfowl and a plethora of plants and invertebrates. For centuries, naturalists have been able to share in the unique joy of witnessing these plants and animals in their natural habitat. Not only is the aesthetic beauty of wetlands and its associated flora and fauna of vital importance to the people of Scotland but wetlands also play a key role in assisting communities. It can do this by providing ecosystem services by storing and purifying our valuable water source, helping to alleviate flooding and mitigating against the effects of climate change with their potential to store carbon.

We may think of Grampian as a dry region; this has not always been the case. The North-East has suffered dramatic loss of wetland habitats such as fen, reedbed, swamp, wet woodland, bog, forest wetland and wet grassland, as indeed has the rest of Scotland, due to extensive drainage, particularly over the last fifty years. With this has come a marked reduction in biodiversity.

To help reverse these declines, a conservation initiative headed by North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (NES LBAP) is being launched in an effort to help restore these valuable habitats. As part of the Action Plan, the NES LBAP is seeking to form partnerships with local landowners and communities to help restore this essential habitat through the Wetland Pilot Project. The initiative, launched this month, is a partnership involving Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Aberdeenshire Council, the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and RSPB, in conjunction with Landcare NorthEast. It has a two-strand approach to help save our vanishing wetlands; identifying potential locations suitable for working with landowners to

Spring 2011 _____ 6

create/restore wetlands and working with communities to help create and sustainably manage smaller wetland areas. For more information, contact Flora Grigor-Taylor or Steff Ferguson at Landcare NorthEast on 013398 81376, or Rose Toney, LBAP co-ordinator on 01224 395189.

Peatlands Rise up the Agenda

The search for ways to reduce the impact of climate change has promoted a steady rise in the profile of peatlands. It is not before time; of the 95,000 ha of lowland raised bog that existed in the UK 100 years ago, just 6% remains in a relatively undisturbed condition. Losses have been due to a combination of factors including afforestation, drainage for agriculture and peat extraction for horticulture. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that these habitats act as natural buffers against climate change, principally by locking away carbon, and that wise management of peatlands has the potential to produce some very significant benefits for the UK's carbon budget. These factors and more have prompted the current IUCN Peatland Programme which brings together peatland scientists, practitioners and policy makers, to tackle barriers that exists to peatland conservation (www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org).

Of course naturalists have also long valued peatlands for their biodiversity. These are not species-rich systems but the wildlife communities that they host are specialised in their reliance on permanently waterlogged ground. The most important plants are the sponge-like *Sphagnum* mosses. Dead *Sphagnum* breaks down slowly and thus contributes to the on-going accumulation of peat. Different species of *Sphagnum*, with slightly different habitat requirements, form diversity on the bog surface as moss hummocks intersperse with wet depressions.

In Aberdeenshire, we are fortunate that a substantial part of the best remaining bog in Kincardineshire is owned by SWT. The Red Moss of Netherley is not pristine. Signs of former peat extraction and drainage are still visible today. However, it is protected as a Special Area of Conservation, a designation reserved for the most important areas of habitat in Europe. Management of the site is low-key and principally involves maintaining the water table as high as possible through blocking of drains. Although not actively promoted, the reserve is open to visitors at all times. There is most to see in summer when several species of dragonfly and damselfly are on the wing and the Large Heath butterfly, which is all but extinct elsewhere in lowland Aberdeenshire, can be found. However, any time of year might produce a surprise and a Great Grey Shrike enlivened the Christmas and New Year period.

Nick Littlewood (n.littlewood@macaulay.ac.uk)

My First Encounter with a Comma Butterfly

Kenneth Watt

Although familiar with text book photos of what a Comma butterfly looks like with its apparently half nibbled wing edges, orangey colouration and the distinctive white comma mark on the underside of the wings, I have never seen a live specimen until last September. This is not surprising since Comma butterflies were until very recently restricted to England. However, reports have come in that they were spreading northwards and had reached the Scottish Borders. Indeed, we should be pleased that the most northerly specimen was sighted last year in the grounds of Castle Fraser.

My encounter was while visiting the area in Berwickshire near Coldingham. I was out hunting the hoverfly as usual and had stopped at a roadside lay-by near for a coffee. Beside the road was a small Elm growing out of a hedge alongside the boundary of a churchyard. I noticed a caterpillar on the elm leaves and it had a distinctive white blotch on its body. This puzzled me because I thought I should know this caterpillar but could not put a name to it.

The next day I was passing through Gifford and had stopped to hunt the hoverfly in the public park next to the river. After having a fruitful time recording some species, I was returning to my car when a movement from within a cast off empty coke bottle caught my eye. I approached and discovered that the movement was the fluttering of a butterfly trapped within the bottle. It had entered to sip the remnants of the sticky nectar and had become trapped there. Indeed, there was another specimen. Unfortunately, it had succumbed and drowned in the liquid. I extracted the hapless specimen and quickly recognised it as a Comma butterfly, my first record, before releasing it. But then the old grey cells started whirring and I realised that in fact my first encounter with a Comma was not this adult but the caterpillar on the Elm leaves (its food plant) the day before. Having recorded an adult as well as a breeding record of this delightful species these sightings really made my day and were in fact the highlight of the weekend away.

A Week Birdwatching in Majorca in May 2010

Rodney Payne

We flew out from Aberdeen (bliss!), on the 7th May on Air Europa, a Spanish airline. It was a cut above the usual cattle-truck airlines. We landed in Palma and joined the long queue to get our pre-booked cars. Being well down the huge queue we ended up with some very fancy vehicles, well above the class we had booked. Off to Puerto Pollensa and the Hotel Capri which was excellent.

In the morning we walked to the Boquer Valley where Eleonora's Falcon was much in evidence and also Kestrel. Crag, Sand, and House Martin wheeled around together with Swift and Pallid Swift. Blackbird, Blackcap and Blue Rock Thrush were abundant. Balearic Spotted Flycatcher were everywhere not only here, but throughout the trip. Various finch species were seen throughout the

day. After the Boquer we drove out to the Lighthouse at Cap des Pinar where Balearic Shearwaters were abundant skimming over the sea below. This being a nesting area for Eleonoras there were lots of them above the shearwaters. A Raven flew overhead. Gulls present were Audouins and Yellow Legged. Back along the peninsular we stopped in a wooded area and saw Cirl and Corn Buntings at the edges and many Crossbills in the trees. Thunderstorms drove us home.

Some "specials" we saw were at the premium birding reserve of the Albufera just south of Peurto. Red Knobbed Coot, Hoopoe, Grebes, Night Heron, Stilts, Egrets, Purple Heron, Swamphen, Warblers, Waders, etc, etc. We heard Savi's and Moustached, the little skulkers were keeping their heads well down. The biggest surprise was a Golden Eagle, apparently it has been in this area for 5 years. Definitely not a Majorcan bird! Many Marsh and Hen Harriers, and Booted Eagle.

The following day it was stormy with thunderstorms and we set out for the mountains thinking it was going to be a wasted day. The rain teemed down but there were short spells of mist/drizzle in between. The clouds were right down, in some places below the road. We saw a Firecrest and then came the surprise of the day. Stopping at a viewpoint were 8 Black Vultures, kept down like ourselves below the clouds. One came and sat on a nearby pinnacle giving us an even better view. Looked much like a Sea Eagle sitting, a bag of feathers with a huge hooked beak. The weather settled after this and we enjoyed perfect birding weather. I will finish with our two big surprises, Marbled Teal and Ferruginous Duck, two firsts for many of the party. We may have been too late for the migration as expected but we ended the week with 89 species and a nice suntan!

Outings Reports

Fungal Foray to Scolty Hill

Kenneth Watt

On a dreich Sunday morning last October six brave souls met up with Liz Holden for a feast of fungal delights on Scolty Hill near Banchory. It was a shame about the poor turnout but understandable since the weather forecast had predicted rain. As it was, it did start to drizzle on our walk. Actually, it is almost impossible to go on a fungal walk with Liz. She is such an enthusiastic devotee of her art that one does not need to venture far to find dozens of interesting specimens. Moreover, every specimen comes with a long tale of facts and anecdotes, which Liz is only too pleased to share with her avid listeners.

Despite our small numbers on this wet day, it was noticeable that Scolty Hill did not lack for other enthusiasts in the form of dog walkers, joggers and family outings. Maybe we should think about putting up some notices in advance of our walks in the local car parks to encourage others to join us on our nature walks.

AGM

Just a reminder that the AGM is on Thursday 21st April at the Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen commencing at 7:30. This will be followed by a talk by Allan Bantick from SWT H/Q on the 'Return of the Beaver'. We do need new committee members, please think about helping with Member Centre organisation. Any nominations should be sent to Rodney Payne as soon as possible.

Delivery of Newsletters

Every newsletter delivered by hand saves the branch the cost of a stamp. There is already a band of volunteers who deliver a bundle of newsletters in their area, but we could do with wider coverage. So if there is anyone who would like an evening or two of exercise twice a year please contact Gavin Forrest.

Final Winter Talks 2011

Thursday 17th March

Craig McAdam – Buglife – conserving the small things that run the world

Thursday 21st April AGM followed by:

Allan Bantick - The Return of the Beaver

All meetings take place at:- Main Lecture Theatre, Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen, Tillydrone Avenue, at 7.30 pm. For further details contact: Rodney Payne 01569 763742. Tea and coffee (and tray bakes!) afterwards £1.00

Notes on Summer outings

Most outings are potentially all day, so bring waterproofs, boots or wellies plus lunch. Map references quoted are OS Landranger 1:50 000 (Map Number and Grid Reference).

Booking is required for all outings on a first-come first-served basis. When booking, please leave your contact phone number.

If insufficient people have booked by the Monday prior to the outing, it may be cancelled.

Summer Outings 2011

Sat 28th May 10.30am

Red Moss of Netherley with Aberdeenshire Ranger Service

Meet at lay-by on Netherley-Cookney Road NO858 933

Packed lunch and wellington boots recommended (walking stick optional!). Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact the Ranger:

David Potter 01569 768292

Sat 11th June 10.30am

Botanical Outing with David Welch

Meet NJ707 459 SW of Turriff

Packed lunch and stout footwear. Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: David Elston 01224 868153

Sat 16th July 10.30am

Glen Tanar Estate with Ranger Eric Baird

Meet at Braeloine Visitor Centre, Glen Tanar

Packed lunch stout footwear. Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: Maureen Borthwick 01224 733920

Sat 20th August 8.00pm

An evening of Bats with Isobel Davidson

Meet Haddo House main car park

Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: Roger Owen 01569 762479

Sat 10th September 9.00am

Early morning Red Squirrel watch in Gight Woods with Hollie Walker

Meet car park B9005 4km NW of Methlick NJ832 399

Packed lunch and stout footwear. Booking essential.

Further details/booking contact: Roger Owen 01569 762479

Contacts for Members

SWT M C Committee	
Dr Roger Owen (Chair)	Tel: 01569 762479 Email: roger@owen25.fsnet.co.uk
David Elston (Treasurer)	Tel: 01224 868153 Email: elstoncox@yahoo.co.uk
Rodney Payne (Secretary)	Tel: 01569 763742 Email: rodney_payne@btopenworld.com
Gavin J. Forrest (Membership Secretary)	Tel: 01224 311667 Email: gjhforrest@btinternet.com
Vacant (Planning and Forestry)	
Lynn Wood (Newsletter Editor & Webmaster)	Email: swtnewsletter@yahoo.co.uk
Local SWT Staff	
Rab Potter (Reserves Manager (North East))	Tel: 01828 634205 Email: rpotter@swt.org.uk
Michael Stevens (Reserves Supervisor) Maintenance	Tel: 01466 780164 Email: mstevens@swt.org.uk

Photograph on the front cover Kenneth Watt.
Printed by Thistle Reprographics - Aberdeen

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland (registered number SC040247) having its registered office at Cramond House, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS. It is also a Scottish registered charity (charity number SC005792).