

## NEWSLETTER 14 - AUGUST 1996

### PROGRAMME OF TALKS

The first four talks of the 95/96 programme have been arranged and are listed below. All meetings will commence at 8.00pm.

- 13th September    Malta: Natural History in the Sun  
                          by Ian Evans  
                          Kirkton Church Hall
- 11th October        Introduction to the Ecology of Skye  
                          by Andrew Currie  
                          Auchtertyre Community Education Hall
- 22nd November    Beyond the Roaring Forties: New Zealand's Sub-Antarctic Islands  
                          by John Love  
                          Auchtertyre Community Education Hall
- 13th December    Along Hadrian's Wall  
                          by Donald Omand  
                          Auchtertyre Community Education Hall

### EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Committee has two proposals to put to the membership and invites you to attend an Extraordinary General Meeting at 7.30pm on 13th September at Kirkton Church Hall. The proposals are as follows:-

1. That the annual subscription be increased from £6 to £8 as from September 1996.
2. That Mr Bill Ramsay be elected as an Honorary President of the Club.

It is hoped that a high proportion of members will be able to attend and also stay on for the talk about Malta at 8.00pm.

### BOAT TRIP TO KNOYDART ON 8TH JUNE

The boat trip from Kyle through Kyle Rhea to the Sound of Sleat and Knoydart on the MV Shearwater proved a great success. The omens were not too promising as we set off under threatening skies and with a fresh south-westerly making the sea rather choppy. As we turned into Kyle Rhea the rain started and we feared the worst. However as we approached Glenelg Bay the rain eased off and it became clear that the strong winds had brought in good numbers of seabirds. One of the first birds seen was a Storm Petrel flying parallel with the boat. Considering the conditions at the time a surprising number of people spotted this tiny seabird. There were large numbers of Guillemots, many still in winter plumage, and good numbers of Kittiwakes and Manx Shearwaters. Only one Gannet and two Razorbills were identified but another surprise was a pair of Common Scoter which flew across the bow of the boat apparently heading from Loch Hourn towards Skye.

A few passengers began to suffer as the seas got rougher but the weather continued to improve and by the time we arrived at Inverie it was dry and bright. Most people disembarked and walked in various directions in and around Inverie whilst some stayed on board and were taken for a cruise up Loch Nevis. Apart from a tricky turn from Loch Nevis into the Sound of Sleat the return journey

was plain sailing and with the wind behind us this stage of the cruise was enjoyed by everyone. The skipper decided that Loch Hourn was a bit too rough for a detour so took us for a sail under the Skye Bridge instead.

Thanks to Roger Knight for organising the outing this year and for making it such a success.

### **SPRING 1996 - WILDLIFE REPORTS**

If the Waxwing influx was the most conspicuous event of the winter then the equivalent event of the spring was the invasion of Painted Lady butterflies. I had only one previous record for Lochalsh prior to 1996 but between 17th June and 2nd July I saw Painted Ladies on Carr Brae, at Avernish, Ardelve, Sallachy, Kyle and Coille Mhor. On 20th June there were no less than 20 at Avernish, mostly along the shore, and on 2nd July I counted 19 along the forestry track through Coille Mhor. These butterflies migrate from North Africa and Southern Europe to Scandinavia and the British Isles where they produce a second brood in late summer. This year the numbers have been exceptional. As with the Red Admiral which is also a migrant, few if any of the second brood survive the winter.

The third cold damp spring in a row resulted in another poor year for the early butterflies such as Orange-tip and Pearl-bordered Fritillary so it was surprising to record my first Speckled Wood of the year on 16th May as I don't normally see this species until well into July. I also recorded my earliest ever Small Heath on 29th May.

The fears expressed in the January Newsletter about the possible effect of the severe frosts last December on Wren and Heron numbers proved unfounded as both these species bred successfully in good numbers. However some species did not fare so well and Dipper, Grey Wagtail and particularly Stonechat were extremely scarce this year. The absence of Stonechats and their characteristic stuttering alarm calls from most of their regular breeding sites was a sad loss.

A pair of Little Grebes bred again on a small upland loch near Balmacara and Lapwings bred at Dubh-aird for the first time, as far as I am aware, since I started watching the area 8 years ago. But probably the most interesting bird sighting of the spring was of a Pied Flycatcher seen entering a nest box in a garden at Glenelg although it did not stay. Pied Flycatcher numbers and distribution appear to be limited by the availability of suitable nest holes. Populations have increased dramatically on some nature reserves where nest boxes have been provided for them. However the spread of Pine Martens into some of these reserves has subsequently caused a drop in Pied Flycatcher numbers due to predation of nests and the boxes are having to be replaced by stronger Marten-proof models.

*Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)*













