

NEWSLETTER 15 - OCTOBER 1996

CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME OF TALKS

Please note that the talk by Andrew Currie has been postponed until 25th October so as not to clash with the presentation to Dr Adamson.

The talk on 13th December will now be given by Jim Hunter and his subject will be "Glencoe and the Indians: How a Highland Family Became Native Americans".

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING, 13th SEPTEMBER

The Committee's proposal to increase the annual subscription to £8 was amended by those members present. It was proposed by Mr A. Bremner and seconded by Mr R. Knight that the subscription be increased to £10 and this was carried unanimously.

The proposal to elect Mr Bill Ramsay as an Honorary President of the Field Club was welcomed by those members present and was also carried unanimously.

THE LOCH DUICH PORPOISES

A team of scientists from Loughborough University along with experts from Denmark and Sweden spent a week in early September studying the Harbour Porpoises in Loch Duich. They were tracking the movements of the porpoises around the loch and studying their behaviour. It is hoped that methods of preventing porpoises getting caught up in fishing nets can be developed once more is known about their feeding habits. The site investigations were very successful. 9 to 14 porpoises were located in Loch Duich each day and from one of the viewing points one mother was actually watched suckling its young.

SUMMER 1996 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

My comments in the August Newsletter that the Wren had bred in good numbers prompted observations that Wrens were in fact quite scarce in some areas, particularly Glenelg and Ratagan.

Three of our four pairs of Black-throated Divers appear to have bred successfully. There was a pair with two fully-grown chicks on Loch Cluanie on 16th August; the first time that I have seen both chicks survive. The divers usually lay two eggs but the success rate is very low and it is good news if one chick reaches maturity so for two to do so is a real bonus. Red-throated Divers on the other hand appeared not to be so successful. They tend to nest a little later and may have been caught out by the heavy rain at the end of June. Divers nest close to the water's edge and are prone to losing their eggs if the water level rises suddenly. There were certainly plenty of Red-throated Divers about this year. Dr Adamson saw 7 on Loch Scalpaidh, an unusual gathering on such a small loch, and I saw 6 feeding off Avernish on 14th August. One of the latter was seen to take off carrying a fish so it seems that at least one pair had reared chicks locally but no young were seen on the known breeding lochs.

The Greylag Goose flock at Kirkton, augmented by juveniles, broke through the 100 barrier as predicted in the April Newsletter when 101 were counted on 12th August. On the same day Kirkton also produced my first Green Sandpiper for Lochalsh. Elsewhere the Goosander flock at the head of Loch Duich peaked at 38 on 21st July and subsequently Goosanders became widespread in places where they are seldom seen.

Stonechats remained very scarce. I found evidence of successful breeding in only two localities - Glen Glennan, near Bundalloch and the Inverinate side of Carr Brae. I recorded no Stonechats in August, a month when this bird is usually widespread as juveniles disperse from the breeding sites. Linnets were present on the marshes at Kirkton from at least 26th July until 6th September with a maximum of 15 on the latter date. The Dubh-aird/Plockton Airstrip area is the only site where

Linnets have been seen on a regular basis in recent years so it would be an interesting development if they become established in the Kirkton area. The Linnet is of course one of the farmland species which the RSPB and BTO are very concerned about. Along with Grey Partridge, Skylark and Corn Bunting their numbers have plummeted on intensively farmed land in lowland Britain. So any increase in our area would be welcome.

Although it was not the sunniest of summers it was nevertheless a good year for butterflies. All the resident species seemed to be about in good numbers as well as the immigrant Painted Ladies and Red Admirals. I saw more Meadow Browns than I have seen before and Scotch Argus were abundant during August. There were over 50 near Loch Palascaig on the 9th and about 30 at Avernish on the 14th.

Another immigrant which has hit the headlines this year is the Silver Y moth and they were very conspicuous in Lochalsh during August. Pat Mucklow saw many in her garden in Kyle and they were widespread on moorland above Carr Brae on 11th, at Avernish on 14th and near Loch Scalpaidh on 24th. Having invested in Bernard Skinner's "Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles" I have been able to make a serious attempt at identifying the moths visiting our garden this year and so far I have managed to identify 84 species. The most spectacular of these have been The Drinker, Large Emerald, Lunar Thorn, Buff-tip, Lesser Swallow Prominent, Scarce Prominent, Merveille du Jour and The Coronet. All this was without the aid of any traps. Apparently if I used a light trap I could expect to double this number of species!

Rosemary and John McLelland found an Elephant Hawk-moth in their garden at Upper Ardelve on 21st August and I am grateful to them for inviting me over to see it. One was found at Braeintra a few years ago and it has also been recorded at Lochalsh Woodland Gardens.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

