

NEWSLETTER 17 - APRIL 1997

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held on 14th March at the Seagreen Restaurant, Kyle. The committee for 97/98 is as follows:

Chairman	John Holt
Vice-Chairman	Pat Mucklow
Secretary	Brian Neath
Treasurer	Andree Bishop
Committee Members	Tim Godfrey
	Roger Knight
	Alistair Mackenzie

The meeting was well attended with 39 members and friends enjoying a very pleasant social evening and excellent buffet.

PROGRAMME OF TALKS

The talk by Lesley Cranna on The Work of Scottish Natural Heritage in Skye and Lochalsh had to be cancelled at short notice and this has been rearranged for Friday 25th April. The venue and time will be as before i.e. Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 8.00pm. In view of the current controversy over the role of SNH it is hoped that this meeting will be well attended with a good discussion afterwards.

THE END OF AN ERA

One of Dornie's most popular residents died on 21st February. The female Mute Swan which lost its mate in 1982 and which was thought to be at least 30 years old was fed daily by many people up and down the length of Loch Long. Its territory stretched from the mouth of the River Elchaig to Eilean Tioram, the island off Ardelve, but it spent much of its later life resting on the shore at Lagg and Brookside. It survived to this exceptional age despite having a badly damaged foot. On the fateful day it was fed early in the morning by Margaret Macmillan but shortly afterwards it was seen by Don MacRae being dragged by the neck by an Otter. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the Otter killed the swan but why it should do so is rather puzzling. Why it should drag such a heavy carcass from the shore to Sheep Island is just as big a puzzle. Otters and the swan have lived as neighbours for all these years and one would suspect that they had a healthy respect for one another. Was it the predator's natural instinct to finish off a dying creature or had the swan made a movement which the Otter interpreted as threatening and protected itself with such a dramatic consequence. It is hard to imagine that the Otter would deliberately kill the swan for food in preference to the abundant supply of fish and eels. The Dornie Mute Swan was ceremoniously buried on the shore at Lagg. This was the only Mute Swan that I have seen in Lochalsh. They are common in the Uists and the Beaully Firth but do not seem to pass through this area at all so it seems very unlikely that another pair will move in to fill the void. It really is the end of an era!

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON CARR BRAE

The rockfall which resulted in the closing of the A87 just east of Eilean Donan in January has had an unexpected beneficial side effect. Dun Beag, which sits directly above the rockfall, has never been examined in detail before. Now with the imminent arrival of a drilling rig to trim back the rock face minds have been concentrated and a team of archaeologists have been carrying out excavations assisted by our own members Bill Ramsay and Gordon McIntyre. Rumour has it that the site dates back to late Iron Age or early Pictish times. Watch this space for detailed revelations in due course.

WINTER 1996/97 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

The 4th of February was one of the few calm sunny days so far this year. I was fortunate to be at Portneora that day and witness the most spectacular movement of Harbour Porpoises that I have ever seen. About 80 porpoises were seen moving up Loch Carron in pods of 5 to 15 in a steady procession quite close to the chain of islands just off-shore and more were still coming from the direction of Kyle when I had to leave. Other porpoise sightings included 5 heading west through the Loch Carron narrows on 2nd February and 3 sightings in Loch Duich during January, the only month for which I had no previous records for this loch.

A Weasel crossed the A87 near Eilean Donan on 6th February carrying a mouse or vole. It really looked as if it was carrying out its Green Cross Code before leaving the safety of the kerb! Another Weasel was seen in safer surroundings along the forestry track through Balmacara Forest on 9th March but I have still to see a Stoat locally. Has anyone seen a Stoat in Lochalsh in recent years? Further north in Assynt Stoats are recorded more frequently than Weasels.

Of the moths which overwinter as adults the most frequent visitors to our windows on Carr Brae were December Moth, Mottled Umber, Winter Moth, March Moth and The Chestnut. Occasional visitors included Pale Brindled Beauty, Dotted Border, Yellow Horned, Common Quaker and Clouded Drab.

Bird numbers and distribution followed a similar pattern to previous winters. One exception was a male Blackcap which Marian Dyer and Mike Fordyce of Ardelve had feeding regularly on peanuts just outside their kitchen window during January, February and into March. Blackcaps occur annually during November but rarely stay with us into the new year. For the second winter running a Great Crested Grebe appeared in the area. This one was seen in Bagh an t-Strathaidh near Plockton on 4th February and 3rd March and amazingly one was seen again at Ardelve on 18th March. Could these sightings relate to the same individual which occurred at Ardelve last winter or do we now have more than one visiting Lochalsh?

An immature Iceland Gull was present in Kyle on 11th February and 7th March providing excellent views from the car park, but for the first winter since 1991/92 I failed to obtain any positive sightings of Little Auks.

The Greenland White-fronted Geese were more elusive than usual in the first half of the winter but were eventually spotted on one of the islands off Portneora on 4th February and subsequently frequented their usual site at Dubh-aird. A single juvenile had survived the rigours of Greenland to augment the flock size to 12 birds from the 11 which wintered with us last year.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

