

NEWSLETTER 26 - AUGUST 1999

PROGRAMME FOR 1999/2000

Following complaints from members about the Auchtertyre venue all meetings in the forthcoming session will be held at Kirkton Church Hall.

- 17th September South Georgia and Antarctica - In the Footsteps
of Shackleton
John Love
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- 29th October * Emigration from the Western Highlands
Marjory Harper
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- 12th November * The Geology of Distilling and Brewing
Stephen Cribb
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- 10th December * 50 Years of Fair Isle Observatory
Roy Dennis
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- 14th January Midges - A Brighter Future Under Climate Change?
George Hendry
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- 18th February The Geology of Lochalsh
Peter MacKenna
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm

* Arranged in association with the University of Aberdeen Centre for Continuing Education.

1999 BOAT TRIP

Apologies to all those who had been looking forward to the trip to Loch Coruisk on 19th June. It wasn't the first time that a Field Club outing has had to be cancelled but it hasn't happened for at least 10 years. Let's hope for better luck next year!

SPRING/EARLY SUMMER 1999 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

Although considerably better than in 1998 the spring weather was again rather disappointing. However the wet weather seemed to suit the wildflowers if not the humans and many people commented on the colourful displays along the road verges, in the woods, meadows and on the moorland. Species which were particularly impressive included Primrose (after a slow start), Lesser Celandine, Bluebell, Marsh Marigold, Lousewort, Common Birdsfoot-trefoil, Hare's-tail and Common Cottongrass, Yellow Flag, Oxeye Daisy, Ragged Robin, Wild Thyme and Common Valerian - more or less in that order. The cottongrasses produced the most extensive white hazes I can remember seeing and the patches of Birdsfoot-trefoil along the A87 and the north road above Auchtertyre seem to get better every year. Common Valerian appeared to grow taller and pinker than usual.

It was also a very good year for orchids. I am grateful to Ishbel Cameron for giving me a conducted

tour of the beautiful flower meadows at Drumbuie and for showing me Small White Orchid and Moonwort (a small fern) neither of which I had seen before. Grazing of the croft land at Drumbuie is being managed in a way that benefits wildflowers and consequently insects and other wildlife. The results of this were evident in the superb displays of Greater and Lesser Butterfly Orchids, various Marsh Orchids, Yellow Rattle and Ragged Robin.

Needless to say the wet, windy weather was not so beneficial for butterflies but it was not all doom and gloom. Ishbel Cameron and I saw a Small Copper at Drumbuie on 2nd June following on from Iain Matheson's sighting of one in Srath Ascaig last year. As far as I am aware these are the first and second records of Small Copper for Wester Ross and only the second and third records from the west coast north of Ardnamurchan. A few Orange-tips were seen again and there were two Pearl-bordered Fritillaries on Carr Brae on 19th and 30th May. Green Hairstreak and Speckled Wood are very hardy species and appear to flourish regardless of the weather. June and the first 3 weeks of July were particularly poor for butterflies and many people claimed not to have seen any at all. Fortunately the catchment area for our private water supply is a particularly good hot spot for butterflies and still managed to produce reasonable numbers of Small Heath, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dark Green Fritillary. The hot spell at the end of July coincided with the emergence of Scotch Argus and this species at least seems to have had a bumper season with exceptional numbers being recorded across the Highlands.

A Wheatear turned up on Carr Brae on 22nd March - the earliest date I have recorded this or any other summer migrant. Swallows also returned early and Tim Godfrey saw two in Balmacara Square on 12th April. This proved to be a bad move as the weather turned very cold and there were stories of Swallows dying from a lack of insect food in the east of the country. Most other migrants arrived more or less on schedule although 4th May was rather an early date to find 5 Sedge Warblers singing at Ardelve.

The National Trust for Scotland is endeavouring to attract Corncrakes to the Drumbuie area by creating "early cover" areas. A Corncrake was heard near Plockton airstrip on 20th May by Iain Matheson but unfortunately it was not heard again. Research in the Corncrake's remaining strongholds in the Hebrides may result in suitable habitats being created to tempt the birds to return to former breeding areas and reverse the decline of this species.

There were exceptional numbers of singing Blackcaps this year with 3 on Carr Brae and others at Nostie, Reraig, Balmacara Square, Inverinate, Kintail Lodge, Ratagan and Galltair.

Sleat produced some of the more interesting bird records during this period including successful breeding by a pair of Long-eared Owls and a singing Pied Flycatcher at Ord during June.

A Thorn-backed Ray fish turned up in Port Cam, Drumbuie at the end of May. It was initially seen alive in the water but eventually died and was washed up on the shore.

About 15 Common Dolphins were seen off the Crowlins on 4th June and Harbour Porpoises were widespread but perhaps less numerous than usual.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

