

NEWSLETTER 27 - NOVEMBER 1999

EMIGRATION FROM THE WESTERN HIGHLANDS

Dr Marjory Harper gave us a fascinating talk on this subject on 29th October. She concentrated mainly on the periods before and after the clearances which are not as well known as the enforced emigrations during the infamous days of mass evictions from the land. She modestly omitted to mention that she had written several books on the subject and so I list these below in case anyone would like to follow up the talk in more detail.

Emigration from North East Scotland (1988). Vol. 1 Willing Exiles
Vol. 2 Beyond the Broad Atlantic

Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c1700 - 1900 (as co-editor).

Emigration from Scotland between the wars: opportunity or exile ? (Manchester University Press January 1999).

Scottish Migration to the Americas, c1650 - 1939. Currently being co-edited for publication by the Scottish History Society.

THE GEOLOGY OF DISTILLING AND BREWING

Our second University of Aberdeen talk of this session was our first geological talk for many years so it was very disappointing that only 11 members attended. Considering that the talk was also about brewing and distilling this was rather surprising! Stephen Cribb gave us an entertaining account of how beers brewed in different parts of Britain are affected by the degree of hardness of the water resulting from the geological structure. The complex geology of the Lothians explains why such a wide variety of beer types are brewed in Edinburgh. Even those of us who had little interest in beer science before, now know all about the intricacies of bitter, mild, IPA, stout and lager! We also had a "guided tour" of all the single malt distilleries and learned that it was only recently that some distilleries realised the significance of the mineral content of their water supplies. This lack of knowledge proved catastrophic for distilleries which had sunk their boreholes in the wrong rock strata and several were forced to close. If you missed the talk you can get a taste of what you missed from the excellent book written by Stephen and his wife Julie with superb illustrations by Richard Bell. It is titled "Whisky on the Rocks" and is published by the British Geological Survey in their popular Earthwise series (æ6.50).

HIGHLAND BIRD REPORT 1997

Whilst on the subject of books please note that the 1997 Highland Bird Report is now available from Colin Crooke, c/o RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness, IV2 3BW and costs æ5.00 plus 50p postage. I already have a copy and can confirm that the binding is back to the high quality of the 1995 report and has a much improved format with records of each species listed under the different districts/counties within the area covered i.e. Inverness-shire, Ross-shire and Sutherland. It is indispensable reading for anyone with an interest in Highland birds.

GUIDED WALKS AROUND SKYE AND LOCHALSH

Have you been on any of the guided walks arranged by The Highland Council Ranger Service? John Phillips, the Skye and Lochalsh Countryside Ranger, produces two impressive programmes each year which come highly recommended. The programme covering the winter period should be available by the time you receive this newsletter. Copies are available from your local post office and council service points. If you have any difficulty contact John on 01478 613606.

SUMMER/EARLY AUTUMN 1999 - WILDLIFE REPORTS (Compiled by Brian Neath 01599 555341)

Some interesting records which did not make the August Newsletter included several sightings of Puffins in Kyle Akin by Barbara and Harry Corrins and Dr John Adamson between 30th May and 22nd June. A female Merlin which boarded a fishing boat near Rockall during gales in late May was brought into Kyle and taken to the Skye Environmental Centre at Broadford. Unfortunately it did not survive and the incident highlights the hazards faced by migrating birds. Presumably this individual was trying to get to Iceland when it ran into adverse weather conditions. How many other land birds perish at sea in such conditions? White-tailed Sea Eagles and Gyr Falcons are the only other birds of prey which breed in Iceland but they do not migrate.

It was good to see terns breeding on the easternmost island of the Eileanan Dubha group off Kyle. As many as 60 birds were in the air over the island on 10th June. They were probably Common Terns but I didn't get close enough to be certain whether they were Common or Arctic. If anyone did manage to identify the terns and knows whether they bred successfully I would be pleased to hear from them.

August and September can be disappointing months for birds with most of the summer migrants gone, winter visitors not yet with us and the majority of autumn migrants preferring to avoid the mountainous north-west Highlands. However September 1999 was my best September to date for number of species recorded - 83 compared with the previous best of 79 and average of 73. The main area of interest was the shore at Balmacara which attracted a good variety of waders including my first Knots for Lochalsh. This species was present from 25th August until 12th September and peaked at 27 birds on 9th. Other waders included Ringed Plover (max. 35), Dunlin (max.5), Redshank and Turnstone (max.27) as well as the ever present Curlews and Oystercatchers. Other birds recorded in Balmacara Bay included Red-throated Diver, Gannet, Wigeon, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Kittiwake, Grey Wagtail and Dipper. To see Greenshanks it was still necessary as usual to visit the saltmarsh near Shiel Bridge.

Other September highlights included 2 Brent Geese at Ardelve, a rare autumn sighting of a Whimbrel near Fernaig, the first Fieldfare and Redwing on Carr Brae on 30th and a Red Grouse making a sharp exit over the Clachan Duich Burial Ground to escape the attentions of a pair of Golden Eagles on Sgurr an t'Searraich!

The butterfly season ended as usual with an influx of Red Admirals in September and October, perhaps in the largest numbers for many years. I saw c.20 outside the Seagreen Restaurant on 24th September. Small Tortoiseshells however remained unusually scarce throughout the year.

Two reports of Mink suggest that this unwelcome predator is getting uncomfortably close with sightings at Kyleakin and on Rona. All sightings should be reported to Roger Cottis on 01471 833325.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS are now due. Please send your cheque with the enclosed slip to Andree Bishop, Tigh Braeintra, Stromeferry, Ross-shire, IV53 8VP.

