

NEWSLETTER 38 - AUGUST 2002

TREASURER

The Committee is pleased to announce that Mrs Violet Beaton has agreed to take on the position of treasurer of the Field Club and has been co-opted on to the Committee. Many thanks to Andree Bishop for looking after our finances for so many years.

PROGRAMME FOR 2002/2003

- Friday, 4th October 4000 Years of Archaeology at Kintail and Balmacara
Jill Harden, NTS Regional Architect for Highlands & Islands
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Saturday, 5th October Site Visit to Local Archaeological Sites
Leader, Jill Harden
10.00am. Meeting point to be arranged at talk on 4th.
- Tuesday, 29th October Crofting and Land Ownership - A Question of Soil and Soul
Alastair McIntosh
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 8th November Britain's Canal Heritage
Donald Patterson (Arranged in conjunction with University of Aberdeen)
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 6th December Scottish Maps and Mapmakers
Dr Jeff Stone (Arranged in conjunction with University of Aberdeen)
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 10th January RSPB Conservation Projects in the Highlands and Islands
Alison MacLennan, RSPB Senior Conservation Officer, Skye & Western Isles
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 14th February The Natural Wonders of Carr Brae - 15 Years' Observations on the Brae
Brian Neath
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Saturday, 29th March AGM Date and venue to be confirmed.
- Friday, 11th April Through Canada with a Kodak 1890-1891: The Travels of Lady Aberdeen
Dr Marjory Harper (Arranged in conjunction with University of Aberdeen)
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 25th April Wildlife in Central India
John Love
Plockton Village Hall at 8.00pm

FIELD MEETINGS

The "Birding by Bus" and "Birds Before Breakfast" outings were successfully repeated on 2nd March and 4th May respectively. Once again these were joint ventures between the Field Club and Highland Council's Countryside Ranger, John Phillips. We are grateful to John for providing the minibus but the good turn out meant that some people had to follow on by car. Starting at the car park in Kyle, from where the large winter flock of Eiders could be clearly seen, we progressed to Balmacara, Reraig, Ardelve, Loch Shiel, Ratagan and over Mam Ratagan to Glenelg. Highlights included Great Northern Divers in both Balmacara and Glenelg Bays, good views of Teal, Wigeon and a Little Grebe at Reraig, a family of Whooper Swans on Loch Shiel and Goldeneye, 5 Goosanders and 2 Greenshank near Ratagan. However, for many the best moment was when we had superb views of several beautiful Yellowhammers and 2 Reed Buntings at the little old farmyard at Ardelve. Some members of the group who lingered longer in admiring the Whooper Swans were rewarded when a mixed flock of Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits together with some Siskins appeared in the scrub by the loch.

Between us we managed to record 49 species compared with 40 species last year.

For the second year running those who got up before the birds on 4th May were rewarded with a glorious morning and we actually managed to assemble in time to hear the first Song Thrushes and Blackbirds start to sing at about 04:15 and then hear the dawn chorus gather momentum as it spread through Dornie and up Carr Brae. The good variety of species heard included Tawny Owl, Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Whinchat, Wood Warbler, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer. 3 members who walked round Ardelve after the others had gone home added Skylark, Grasshopper Warbler and Sedge Warbler to the list. Altogether 27 species were heard singing or calling and a further 22 species were seen, making the total just one short of last year's total of 50.

THE GLENELG STRIPED DOLPHINS

The pathological report from the Scottish Agricultural College Wildlife Unit showed that both the Striped Dolphins were young females and that both had live stranded on the beach at Glenelg. One was found to have been suffering from chronic meningitis and the other from parasitic mastitis. The conclusion was that the meningitis would have caused a severe headache and was probably the reason for the dolphin stranding itself on the beach. This condition has been diagnosed previously in stranded Striped Dolphins. The mastitis was unusual but was not thought to have been of clinical significance. Being social animals it is thought that the smaller female followed the other on to the beach where they both died. A sad episode, but at least there didn't appear to be any foul play by trawlers as I had first suspected. This incident highlights the valuable information that can be obtained by reporting stranded cetaceans.

SPRING/SUMMER 2002 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

The fine weather in April and early May resulted in some exceptionally early butterfly sightings. Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Green-veined White, Green Hairstreak and even an Orange-tip (seen at Duirinish by Pat Mucklow) were recorded before the end of April whilst May produced my earliest records of Painted Lady and Speckled Wood on 3rd and Pearl-bordered Fritillary on 6th. On 5th May I counted an unprecedented 46 Green Hairstreak on Carr Brae. As the weather deteriorated in June and July so the number of butterfly sightings fell. The species most affected were Meadow Brown and Common Blue as their main flight periods coincided with the worst of the weather. However, Dark Green Fritillary, Small Heath, Speckled Wood and Green-veined White could still be found in good numbers during the infrequent short sunny intervals. By the time the Scotch Argus emerged at the end of July the temperatures had, at last, begun to approach the seasonal average and this species was common and widespread during August as usual. It was also reassuring to find that one or two Common Blues had survived through into August.

Whatever the human population thought about the weather it seemed to suit the wildflowers, ticks and midges! Practically all the flowers had a good season and especially Primrose, Bluebell, Cuckooflower, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Valerian and Yellow Saxifrage. The masses of Yellow Saxifrage in the rock cuttings on the north road near Lochalsh Dam and along the A87 near Kintail Lodge were particularly impressive. The Hawthorn shrubs near Ardelve and Shiel Bridge were more spectacular than I can remember in any previous year.

The majority of summer migrants arrived more or less to schedule. The exceptions were Common Sandpipers, which arrived late and remained uncommon, and House Martins, which also arrived late but eventually became widespread and fairly common. Some people complained about not hearing any Cuckoos this year whilst others complained about hearing them too often! Ardelve, Drumbuie and Dubh-aird were amongst the localities where Cuckoos were scarcer than usual. Grasshopper Warblers arrived in good numbers and several were heard in the Reraig/Auchtertyre area by John Holt and the Ardelve/Conchra area by Mike Fordyce. A Corncrake was heard at Drumbuie on 26th April but like the one at Dubh-aird a couple of years ago it wasn't heard again despite the NTS's best efforts in creating Corncrake habitat in the area. The place to be for rare birds was the Lochcarron/Strathcarron area. A Hoopoe was seen at Strathcarron on the early date of 14th April and remained for several days. This was followed by a White Stork on the saltings at the head of Loch Carron in early May. Then a Scarlet Rosefinch appeared on Josephine and Roy Dean's bird table on 30th May. This latter species has been relegated to "Common Rosefinch" by the powers that determine the names of our birds but I am not moved to accept their recent changes as yet!

Interesting bird of prey sightings included a Red Kite between Erbusaig and Drumbuie on 14th May and an Osprey diving in Nostie Bay on 2nd August. However I am aware of no Sea Eagle sightings in Lochalsh this year and no Hen Harriers for the 3rd year running. If anyone can correct me on this I would be delighted!

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341). Recent observations and/or short articles always welcome.