

NEWSLETTER 41 - MAY 2003

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM and Social Evening was held on 28th March in the Kyle Hotel. The new format and venue were reasonably successful but it was disappointing that less than 30 members attended out of a total membership of 77. All the existing office bearers and committee members were re-elected so the committee remains unchanged.

GARDEN WILDLIFE SURVEY

There has been an encouraging response to the survey and to date 38 questionnaires have been returned. There is still time to submit a completed questionnaire if you have not already done so. It does not matter if you are unable to identify some of the species listed, just answer what questions you can. It will be interesting to know how many people feed the birds in their garden, how many gardens have House Sparrows and Hedgehogs, for example. Many thanks to those who have returned their forms so far. Hopefully there should be an analysis of the results in the August newsletter.

FIELD MEETINGS

- Saturday 7th June Joint meeting with Highland Biological Recording Group in Plockton/Kyle area looking for rare day-flying moths (Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth, Argent & Sable) and fritillary butterflies. Meet at Plockton Station at 11:15.
For further details contact Brian Neath on 01599 555 341.
- Monday 9th June Working Party meeting at Glen Shiel Battle Site with Jill Harden to decide on work to be carried out this season. All interested members are welcome to attend.
Meet at the Battle Site lay-by on the A87 at 14:30.
- Saturday 19th July
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the Outing to the Island of Raasay using the ferry service from Sconser. Minibuses from Outdoor Centre will be available to transport members to various parts of the island.
Dolphin Cafe in Raasay House is open for light refreshments and lunches. For further information contact Pat Mucklow on 01599 53 4719. If you want to take advantage of the transport please book with Brian Neath on 01599 555 341.
Meet at the Sconser ferry in time for the 09:30 ferry. The return fare for passengers is £4.40 but is free for holders of Highland Council Travel Cards.

ONE FOR THE BOOKSHELF

“Whirligig Beetles and Tackety Boots” by Julia MacKenzie published by Blaisden Publishing, 3 Park Chase, Hornby, Bedale, North Yorkshire, DL8 1PR.

Mrs MacKenzie was born in 1923 on Eilean Tighe, island of the house, off the north end of Raasay. In 1933 the family moved to Kyle Rona, some two miles across from the tidal island of her birth. The book describes an almost forgotten way of life in the islands; how a family was brought up in an area where there was much hardship and few luxuries, although to the author it seemed like paradise. Julia, or Sheila as was her name on her army paybook, joined up in 1941 and saw service in England, France and Germany, but the story mainly concentrates on her childhood days and growing up on the island.

Proceeds from the sale of the book will go to help the work of Blythswood Care, Evanton, Ross-shire. It is a little pricey at £10.25 but I would still recommend it to anyone interested in the old Highland way of life on the croft and living at the edge of a sparsely populated countryside. I am sure that any of the Blythswood shops will be able to obtain copies.

Contributed by Bill Ramsay.

WINTER 2002/2003 – WILDLIFE REPORTS

Although it was an exceptionally dry and mild winter it was nevertheless a total surprise to have reports of Swallows in both Kyle and Kyleakin during December, especially as there had not been any late records in the autumn. This must surely be the first ever December record for Lochalsh.

It was also surprising that Britain experienced another Waxwing invasion so soon after that in the 2000/2001 winter; these influxes are usually more sporadic. Fewer reached our part of the country than in January 2001 but the few birds seen were again in January. Roni Miller had 5 in his garden in Kyle on 9th and 10th January while one or two were reported from Lochcarron, Achmore and Kyleakin around 27th and 28th of the month.

Exceptional numbers of auks were present in Outer Loch Carron during January and February. I counted about 860 from the shore near Portneora on 8th January and there must have been many more out of range. Most of the birds were out in mid-channel so it was impossible to determine the ratio of Guillemots to Razorbills but both of these species could be identified amongst those closer to the shore. As usual at this time of year a few Little Auks could be picked out amongst their larger relatives, especially in flight. A stranded Little Auk was found by Willie Fraser at Morvich on 25th January and several were also picked up in Glen Carron at about the same time. Auks, like Manx Shearwaters in autumn, are prone to being stranded inland following gales. They are unable to take off from the ground so unless they are found and returned to the sea they will inevitably perish. The strange feature of the Little Auk strandings was that there hadn't been any significant gales. Whilst on the subject of auks it was gratifying to find the remains of only one auk during the annual Beached Bird Survey of Kirkton and Balmacara Bays this year compared with 19 corpses last year (12 of which were auks). Apparently this was typical of the general situation throughout Skye and Lochalsh with very few casualties being found along the shore.

Pat Mucklow was the latest member to have a Goldfinch feeding on peanuts in her garden but as is often the case it only stayed for one day. However Josephine and Roy Dean were lucky enough to have two feeding throughout the period 27th January to 20th February and one again on 30th April.

There were three surprise reports of Red-legged Partridge at the end of March from Ardelve, Conchra and Balmacara Square, the latter being a road casualty, as was the only previous record I know of at Inverinate in May 2000. I would be interested to know of the origin of these birds if anyone has any inside information. The Red-legged Partridge is an introduced species now living ferally in many parts of Britain but is still released by "sporting estates" from time to time.

A Black-tailed Godwit in Kirkton Bay on 11th February was an unexpected winter visitor for the west coast. My only two previous records have been of autumn migrants in August and October. 5 Purple Sandpipers were an interesting by-product of a check on the Heronry on Eilean a'Mhal, off the Plock of Kyle, on 14th March. My only previous record was also in March on the Sandaig Islands.

Pheasants have been turning up in many gardens following the release of birds at Totaig., but Roger Knight was amazed to see a cock Pheasant on his bird table attempting to feed from a peanut container! In another interesting garden encounter Pat Mucklow interrupted a Sparrowhawk which had caught a Collared Dove. When the Sparrowhawk flew off she was surprised to find that the dove was still alive and eventually recovered sufficiently to be able to fly away. However the bird is readily identifiable by its scruffy appearance having lost some feathers during its adventure. The resident House Sparrows wasted no time in collecting the plucked feathers for their nests!

SPRING ARRIVES EARLY

Bumblebees in February and the first Wheatear on 20th March heralded the commencement of an exception period of record-breaking occurrences of many flowers, bees, moths. Butterflies and birds. A detailed report will follow in the next newsletter. Please let me have your own early records if you have not already done so.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath 01599 555 341