

NEWSLETTER 42 - AUGUST 2003

PROGRAMME FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER

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| Friday, 12 th September | Travels of a Geologist Dr Ian Basham Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm |
| Friday, 17 th October | Philately Will Get You Nowhere! Dr Jeff Stone Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm |
| Friday, 21 st November | Scottish Mammals Bob Laing Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm |
| Friday, 12 th December | A Hunter Gatherer Landscape: Searching For Evidence of the Earliest Settlers of the Scottish West Coast Steven Birch Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm |

All the above lectures have been arranged in association with University of Aberdeen Key Learning Opportunities. We are fortunate to have been allocated four lectures this year rather than the usual three. This is partly in acknowledgement of our record of good attendances. Please ensure that we remain true to our reputation!

FIELD EXCURSION TO RAASAY

On 19th July we broke with our tradition of recent years and made use of the ferry service to Raasay rather than hire a boat to take us to one of the Small Isles or Knoydart. The outing was very successful and enjoyed by all those who attended. This was in no small part due to the excellent service provided by the Outdoor Centre in transporting us around the island in their minibus. Also to Rebecca MacKay of the Raasay Heritage Centre who opened up the museum for us and gave us an introductory talk (and a Gaelic Song!) about the history of the island. Some members walked at the north end of the island in the vicinity of Arnish and Torran whilst others walked in the south east from North Fearn to Hallaig. Some took advantage of the minibus to tour the island and then spend the rest of the day in the vicinity of Raasay House with its excellent Dolphin Café. A Golden Eagle was seen along the south east cliffs and Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Dark Green Fritillary butterflies plus a spectacular Garden Tiger moth were seen in the north. Letters of thanks and donations were sent to both the Outdoor Centre and the Raasay Heritage Centre.

FIELD MEETINGS ON 7th & 9th JUNE

The outing to Strathie and Badicaul on 7th June failed to find any Argent & Sable moths. David Barbour did see one Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth although he didn't manage to net it for closer observation. However we did see several other interesting moths including Silver Hook, Clouded Buff, Clouded Border, Bordered White and Peacock Moth as well as many Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies, Large Red and Common Blue Damselflies and my only Painted Lady butterfly of the year so far.

The working party meeting at the Glen Shiel Battle Site with Jill Harden and Diana Holt of NTS was very productive. With 7 pairs of hands pulling bracken and Roger Knight on his strimmer we made a big impression on the path up to the site from the lay-by on the main road. Many thanks to those who helped; further visits are awaiting a call from Jill.

SPRING 2003 - WILDLIFE REPORTS - A SPRING TO REMEMBER

Phenologically speaking Spring 2003 was exceptional for a record number of early occurrences. Many plants, bumblebees, moths, butterflies and migrant birds were recorded earlier than usual and my own observations produced an amazing number of earliest-ever occurrences. This started with the first White-tailed Bumblebees (*Bombus lucorum*) on 24th February, Elder budburst and the first (wild) Primroses in flower on 2nd March, Larch budburst on 11th March, Lesser Celandine in flower on 13th March and the first migrant Wheatear on 20th March. The following list shows the extent of this early explosion of spring events where I have a sufficient number of years' data for comparison.

| Species | 2003 | Date | Previous Earliest | Average Arrival/ | Period of |
|---------|------|------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
|---------|------|------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|

| | | Date | Emergence Date | Observations |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Bombus lucorum | 24 th February | 13 th March 2002 | 16 th March | 2000 to 2002 |
| Green-veined White | 20 th April | 1 st May 2001 | 12 th May | 1995 to 2002 |
| Orange-tip | 23 rd April | 2 nd May 2002 | 16 th May | 1997 to 2002 |
| Green Hairstreak | 24 th April | 27 th April 2002 | 5 th May | 1995 to 2002 |
| Pearl-bordered Fritillary | 24 th April | 6 th May 2002 | 18 th May | 1995 to 2002 |
| Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary | 31 st May | 1 st June 1997 | 12 th June | 1995 to 2002 |
| Dark Green Fritillary | 9 th June | 15 th June 2002 | 29 th June | 1995 to 2002 |
| Speckled Wood | 20 th April | 3 rd May 2002 | 12 th May | 1996 to 2002 |
| Scotch Argus | 18 th July | 18 th July 1999 | 1 st August | 1995 to 2002 |
| Small Heath | 18 th May | 22 nd May 2000 | 30 th May | 1996 to 2002 |
| Cuckoo | 22 nd April | 23 rd April 1993 | 28 th April | 1988 to 2002 |
| Tree Pipit | 22 nd April | 24 th April 2000 | 27 th April | 1988 to 2002 |
| Whinchat | 22 nd April | 24 th April 1996 | 1 st May | 1988 to 2002 |
| Wheatear | 20 th March | 22 nd March 1999 | 31 st March | 1988 to 2002 |
| Grasshopper Warbler | 20 th April | 23 rd April 1996 | 8 th May | 1988 to 2002 |
| Garden Warbler* | 3 rd May | 4 th May 1995 | 21 st May | 1991 to 2002 |
| Wood Warbler | 20 th April | 26 th April 1992 | 30 th April | 1988 to 2002 |

* *Garden Warbler not recorded every year. Average arrival date based on 7 years only.*

I was away from 3rd until 19th April and it seems certain that I would have recorded some of these species even earlier if I had been at home during this period. A visiting member of the Highland Biological Recording Group, Gill Nisbet, saw Green-veined White and Green Hairstreak butterflies on 19th April and Orange-tip on the 20th in the Morvich and Killilan areas. Eleanor and Hubert Hunton had an Orange-tip at Coilliemore as early as 15th April, almost certainly the earliest ever recorded in Lochalsh. They also saw the first Swallow of the year in Balmacara Square on 16th April while Rod Stenson heard the first Willow Warbler singing on Carr Brae on 13th April.

Early dates persisted even when the weather deteriorated during May and June. Clearly the pattern had been set by the warm dry weather in March and April. The early emergence of bumblebees wasn't necessarily a good omen.

Subsequently I saw far fewer in the garden than in the previous three years. This may have been due to the early plants such as heathers and azaleas flowering and fading much earlier than usual making the garden less attractive to the bees in May and June. Hopefully wildflowers outside the garden were also sufficiently early to compensate and so provide the bees with adequate supplies of nectar at this crucial time.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath 01599 555 341.