

NEWSLETTER 49 - MAY 2005

SUMMER PROGRAMME

- Wednesday, 8th June Drumbuie/Port-an-eorna Coastal Walk
Joint Meeting with Scottish Wildlife Trust Skye Members
Meet at the level crossing near Duirinish Station at 11.00am.
- Saturday/Sunday
25th/26th June Dragonfly Week-end. Joint venture by the British Dragonfly Society
and the NTS Balmacara Estate.
For details contact Brian Neath (01599 555 341) or Barbara Soutar (01599 566 325)
- Wednesday, 6th July
(Provisional date) Working Party visit to Glen Shiel Battle Site (bracken clearing etc)
Meet at the Battle Site lay-by at 14:30
Contact Brian Neath in advance in case of change of date.
- Saturday, 27th August Boat Trip to the Isle of Eigg
Depart from Armadale at 9.30am. To book please complete the enclosed slip and return to
Pat Mucklow.
- Monday, 19th September Maerl Beaches around Eilean na Creige Duibhe (for shore life at low tide)
Leader: James Merryweather
Meet at car park at Craig Highland Farm at 1.00pm (bring packed lunch)
To book and to obtain information sheet contact Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM and Social Evening was held at the Gateway Restaurant on 15th April. The office bearers were re-elected and two new committee members (Audrey Sinclair and James Merryweather) were elected. The Committee is now as follows: John Holt (Chairman), Pat Mucklow (Vice-Chairman), Brian Neath (Secretary), Vi Beaton (Treasurer), James Merryweather, Bill Ramsay and Audrey Sinclair. Jean Camilli resigned from the Committee and Carol Weale resigned from tea-making duties. Many thanks to both for filling these positions for lengthy periods.

THE HIGHLAND AND MORAY BIRD RACE

On 6th February a team from Skye and Lochalsh participated in a bird race along with several teams from other parts of the Highlands and Moray. The idea was to see or hear as many bird species as possible in the day with all five members having to see (or hear) every species for it to count. We had a good start on Carr Brae where we ticked off most of the anticipated garden birds, including Bullfinch, Siskin and Goldcrest, but the regular Treecreeper let us down by not appearing by the deadline. Ardelve was particularly good providing Little Grebe, Grey Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Redwing, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting and an unexpected Twite. At Shiel Bridge we added Whooper Swan, Goldeneye, Greenshank and Goldfinch. The next stops were at Reraig and Balmacara Bay where a Pink-footed Goose was spotted amongst the Greylags in the field and Teal, Ringed Plover, Turnstone and a Knot (another surprise) were seen along the shore. By the time we crossed the Skye Bridge our total had reached 49 species so Lochalsh had made a significant contribution. At Kyleakin we added Eider, Black-headed Gull and a belated Pied Wagtail. We were lucky to find 6 early Lapwings at Breakish but a bitter fresh wind at Broadford made life difficult as the sea was too rough to spot much on the sea. The sound between Skye and Scalpaidh was better and we were able to identify Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Slavonian Grebe and three auk species. Trotternish produced a grand finale with three Golden Eagles at the Storr, Tufted Duck on Loch Mealt, Fulmars at the Kilt Rock and Hen Harrier at the far north just as dusk was closing in on us. The final total of 72 species just exceeded our target of 70 so there was general satisfaction all round. The team consisted of Roger Cottis, Bob McMillan, Martin Benson, Brian Neath and John Phillips.

DAWN CHORUS WALK

On 7th May eight members enjoyed an early start to the day at the Lochalsh Woodland Garden and as we assembled at the car park we were welcomed by a hooting Tawny Owl. The first songbird to start singing was a Robin at 04:20 and this was closely followed by Song Thrush, Blackbird and Wren. The Wren turned out to be the most numerous songster in the Woodland Garden with perhaps as many as 15 singing whilst Chaffinch was the second most numerous. Other birds encountered were Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Goldcrest with two Blackcaps and a Wood Warbler representing the less familiar species. For some of the group the highlight was a Common Sandpiper "piping" continuously on the shore, perching prominently on a boulder and allowing excellent views. The weather was much kinder than we dared to hope for from the forecast and the outing was rounded off in fine style with a superb breakfast at Dr Mary's.

LATE WINTER/SPRING 2005 – WILDLIFE REPORTS

All the concern about global warming has resulted in even more interest than usual being shown in the arrival dates of our summer migrants. All sorts of organizations have been asking us to inform them when we see our first Swallows and Cuckoos etc. The BBC was one such organization and Bill Oddie (who else?) will be including the results in a series of Springwatch programmes during the first three weeks of June.

In Lochalsh the arrival dates this year have been mixed, some early, some later than usual. The first report was Rod Stenson's **Chiffchaff** on 24th March, the first March record I know of in Lochalsh. Other species arrived as follows: 9th April - **Wheatear** on Carr Brae (late, BN); 15th April – 6 very early **House Martins** at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich (Roger Tufft); 15th April – **Ring Ouzel** on Creag Reidh Raineach (late, but few seen in recent years, BN); 17th April – **Willow Warbler** on Carr Brae (late, BN); 19th April – **Cuckoo** at Dubh-aird, Plockton (early, Donald Ross); 21st April – **Swallow** on Carr Brae (late, Niall Haig); 22nd April – **Tree Pipit** on Carr Brae (early, BN); 23rd April – **Redstart** on Carr Brae (early, BN); 23rd April – **Wood Warbler** on Carr Brae (early, BN); 23rd April – **Blackcap** on Carr Brae (early, Rod Stenson); 24th April – **Common Sandpiper** at Loch Shiel (average, BN); 24th April - **Sand Martin** at Morvich (average, BN); 30th April – **Grasshopper Warbler** at Reraig (early, John Holt, but later than 2003 and 2004); 2nd May – **Garden Warbler** on Carr Brae (early, BN); 4th May – **Whinchat** near Leth-allt bridge (late, BN); 4th May – **Whitethroat** near Leth-allt bridge (early, BN); 11th May – **Sedge Warbler** near Coilliemore (late, BN); 13th May - **Spotted Flycatcher** at Glenelg (Jean Saville) and on Carr Brae (average, BN).

Surprisingly members of the Assynt Field Club recorded Common Sandpiper, Cuckoo, Swallow, Wheatear and Willow Warbler all on earlier dates despite being so much further north than Lochalsh. Do some birds by-pass our area or does the Assynt FC have more people looking out for migrants than we do? Less surprisingly many species were recorded earlier on Skye as migrants tend to be noted earlier on islands than on the mainland. Exceptionally early arrivals on Skye this year were Wheatear on 20th March, Swallow on 2nd April, Whinchat on 8th April and Sedge Warbler on 2nd May. However we tend to have the edge with woodland species such as Chiffchaff, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Wood Warbler and Garden Warbler.

Unusual bird sightings in the first quarter of 2005 included a Slavonian Grebe in Nostie Bay on 24th January, a drake Mandarin Duck at the head of Loch Long on 17th and 18th February, 1-2 Barnacle Geese with Greylags at Conchra, Killilan and Dubh-aird during January and February, a Magpie seen by Irene Gibson near Achmore on 25th March and Iceland Gulls at the Croe Saltings on 16th January and at Balmacara Bay (two) on 24th January. There were three more reports of Barn Owls, at Badicaul, Kirkton and Portnacloich, although this species continues to elude me. Josephine Dean had a good count of 34 Turnstones at Lochcarron on 2nd January but there were fewer than usual in Balmacara Bay. Ishbel Cameron was lucky to have Yellowhammers and a Reed Bunting feeding regularly in her garden for a second year.

It has been a stuttering start to the year for butterflies. Rowena and Kenneth Oliver had some surprisingly early sightings again at Allt nan Sugh with a Peacock and a Small Tortoiseshell on 20th March and a Red Admiral on 28th March. I had to wait until 19th April for my first butterflies which were also Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Peacocks really are becoming more regular in our area but primarily in early spring. Green-veined White followed on 20th and then I located 6 Green Hairstreak on 22nd. The first Orange-tip was reported by Roger Tufft on 3rd May and Josephine Dean has been seeing this species regularly in Lochcarron. Jean Camilli also saw an Orange-tip in her garden at Ratagan for the third year running. The first Pearl-bordered Fritillary emerged on Carr Brae on 11th May and during the rest of May this "rare" butterfly was only outnumbered by Green-veined White. Speckled Wood is the only other butterfly to have been seen so far this year but it seems to be less conspicuous than in recent springs, perhaps not surprisingly in view of the cooler weather.

SKYE BIRDS

The new book by Bob McMillan will be launched at the Aros Centre, Portree at 7.30pm on 2nd June and at the Community Hall, Elgol at 7.45pm on 3rd June. Bob will also give an illustrated talk and all members are welcome to attend.

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