

NEWSLETTER 52 - JANUARY 2006

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

Please note that Michael Scott is unable to give his talk at Achmore on 10th February. James Merryweather has kindly agreed to step in and his talk will be titled "Ross: What Are They Doing to Our Countryside?".

THE WEATHER IN 2005

It was another disappointing year weatherwise and Duncan Glen-Riddell's readings at Reraig confirm that it was indeed a very wet year. However there were 32 fewer rainy days than in 2004 and 6.38 inches less rain fell than in 2004 - if that is any consolation! The trend of higher average temperatures continued with the exceptions of February and May. The readings for 2005 are shown below with the average figures for the years 1985 to 2005 in brackets.

| | Rainfall | | Temperature (Celsius) | |
|-----------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| | mm | ins | ave max | ave min |
| January | 383 | 15.08 (9.29) | 9.84 (7.84) | 2.74 (1.90) |
| February | 150 | 5.90 (7.72) | 7.71 (8.40) | 0.68 (1.46) |
| March | 145 | 5.71 (7.80) | 11.39 (10.00) | 3.35 (2.50) |
| April | 120 | 4.72 (4.21) | 13.10 (12.19) | 4.33 (3.62) |
| May | 121 | 4.76 (3.43) | 14.65 (15.67) | 5.35 (5.86) |
| June | 107 | 4.21 (3.98) | 17.47 (17.21) | 8.93 (8.03) |
| July | 69 | 2.72 (4.17) | 18.65 (18.56) | 9.77 (9.77) |
| August | 222 | 8.74 (5.28) | 18.35 (18.61) | 9.97 (9.73) |
| September | 290 | 11.42 (6.34) | 17.10 (16.57) | 11.08 (8.01) |
| October | 229 | 9.02 (7.95) | 15.81 (13.38) | 7.78 (6.01) |
| November | 226 | 8.90 (7.95) | 10.33 (10.17) | 3.00 (3.56) |
| December | 140 | 5.51 (8.23) | 9.10 (8.12) | 2.43 (1.92) |
| Totals | 2202 | 86.69 (76.42) | | |

The readings for the 21 years from 1985 to 2005 show that we don't tend to get more than two consecutive years with more than 2000mm or 78.74ins of rain. This suggests that 2006 should be drier than the last two years but don't put any money on it! Rain fell on 219 days in 2005 compared with 251 in 2004. These are days on which a minimum of one millimetre could be measured in the rain gauge. The number of rainy days per annum seems to fluctuate less than the total amount of rain. In fact 219 is less than the average of 226 days whereas the total rainfall for the year was 13 % above the average. The wettest day of the year was 13th September when 77mm (3.03ins) was recorded. Other wet days included 15th March (2.20ins) and 9th October (2.09ins). The best dry spells were from 15th to 26th April when 7mm (0.27ins) rain fell on just one day and 22nd July to 1st August when no rain was recorded.

A graph of the annual average maximum temperatures for the 21 year period 1985 to 2005 shows a gradual increase of almost two degrees Celsius. A similar graph of the annual average minimum temperatures shows a gradual increase of about one degree Celsius. These levels of increase are not particularly evident in the weather in general. My own impression is that the higher temperatures have been accompanied by less sunshine hours so that it has not felt warmer. However the natural world does appear to be reacting to the underlying higher temperatures with early flowering plants, earlier emergence of many insects and the earlier arrival of migrating birds. In 2005 the warmest day was 29th June when a maximum temperature of 27 degrees was recorded and the lowest temperature was -4 degrees on 24th February. A notable high of 21 degrees was recorded on 19th March. Although July was a relatively dry month on only four days did the maximum temperature exceed 20 degrees. Similarly in August, traditionally the warmest month, the maximum temperature exceeded 20 degrees on only two days.

Many thanks again to Duncan for sharing his weather readings with us.

LATE AUTUMN/WINTER 2005/2006

It has been a rather lacklustre period for wildlife recording. Many bird species seem to be present in lower numbers than usual, even common species such as Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher and Redwing. Seabirds have had another disastrous breeding season and this is reflected in the virtual absence of Guillemots and Razorbills which usually move into Loch Carron, Loch Alsh and Glenelg Bay in large numbers in late December and January. Garden birds seem to have fared better, probably due to the ever-increasing number of people who are feeding birds throughout the year. Collared Dove, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow and Chaffinch all seem to be as numerous as ever.

Between three and six adult Whooper Swans could be seen on Loch Shiel during November and December and the number increased to eight on 7th January including a juvenile bird. This group may have included a pair with a juvenile that had spent some time on Loch Achaidh na h-Inich during December. It was November before any Goldeneye returned to their wintering sites. Numbers seem to be low again this winter but a few can be seen in their regular haunts in the Port-an-eorna/Dubh-aird area, Loch Achaidh na h-Inich and the Shiel Bridge area. It is one of the few species that can be found on both the sea and freshwater during the winter months. There was a flock of 17 Eiders in Loch Duich on 13th November. Eiders usually only move up into the loch between mid-March and early July and this group must have been seeking shelter from the gales.

Iain Turnbull saw a Barn Owl at Glaick on 25th November, there was a Kingfisher near Strathcarron on 3rd December and a Peregrine was harassing a flock of domestic pigeons at Coilliemore on 13th January. Skye had more than its fair share of rare birds in this period with Blackpoll Warbler, Little Egret and Bittern appearing near Elgol, at Drynoch and near Uig respectively. The Blackpoll Warbler must be one of the rarest birds ever to have occurred on Skye; it breeds in the extreme north of North America from Alaska to Labrador and winters in northern parts of South America. It has been estimated that the Alaskan birds have to fly a minimum of 3500 miles. It is thought that this bird was blown across the Atlantic by gale force winds.

Several more records of late Red Admirals have come to light since the last newsletter including three in November. These were in the gardens of Ishbel Cameron at Drumbuie, Jessie MacGregor in Kyle and Elspeth and Bill Page in Glenelg on the 3rd and 4th of the month. Jean Stewart had a Painted Lady in her garden at Lochcarron on 16th October, possibly the only sighting in the Highlands during 2005. There were very few reports of this migrant butterfly in the whole of the UK last year.

GARDEN WILDLIFE SURVEY

Early returns from the 2005 Garden Wildlife Survey seem to indicate that the Goldfinch has become more widespread since the previous survey. I had thought from my own observations that it had been a poor year for Goldfinches although they did become more conspicuous during December. The forms returned so far include an impressive 58 bird species that visited Lochalsh gardens during 2005. Perhaps the most unexpected species so far is Barnacle Goose but other birds recorded include Heron, Curlew, Rock Dove, Cuckoo, Stonechat, Twite and Reed Bunting as well as the more traditional garden and woodland birds. No one has reported a Fox or Badger as yet but there have been widespread records of Pine Marten and bats. Frogs and Toads seem to have been quite scarce but there have been more Slow Worms than expected. Although it was a poor year for Red Admiral butterflies this species was reported more than any other, possibly because it is the butterfly that members are most familiar with.

If you have completed the 2005 survey please send your results to the Secretary as soon as possible. Don't worry if you have missed one or two months, your records will still be valuable and will be included in the analysis of the completed forms.

www.skye-birds.com

If you would like to keep up to date with what is happening locally in the birdwatching world it is worth logging on to Bob McMillan's website as above. Bob also includes bird sightings from Lochalsh as well as Skye and everyone is encouraged to send in their latest sightings. The website also has photos of many of the birds seen, has maps of the best places to see birds and has links to other relevant websites as well as details of local events.

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