

NEWSLETTER 54 - OCTOBER 2006

PROGRAMME

- Friday, 17th November 2006 The Wildlife of a Highland Glen
Richard Prentice
Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 8.00pm.
- Friday, 8th December 2006 The Machairs of Uist
Dr John Love
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
- Friday, 12th January, 2007 A Long Day Amongst the Ice
Gordon Brown of Skyak Adventures, Isleornsay
Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm

BOAT TRIP TO CANNA

At last we managed to get to Canna on 19th August after several failed attempts in recent years, including the proposed visit in May of this year. The sea was a bit choppy but fortunately the Sound of Sleat was more sheltered and Bruce Watt was able to collect us and return us safely to the pier at Armadale. Despite the unpromising forecast the weather was ideal and everyone was able to pursue their own interests whether that was the wildlife, the archaeology or the religious attractions of the island. I was pleasantly surprised to see nine different species of butterfly during a walk from the pier through the village and round Sanday Island. These were Peacock, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Green-veined White, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Scotch Argus and Small Heath. No doubt Grayling and Speckled Wood could also have been found with more time at our disposal. There was a Greenshank and several Redshank along the muddy channel between Canna and Sanday. A few Wheatears and Twite were also seen as well as a flock of about 200 Starlings feeding amongst a herd of cattle on Sanday. Unfortunately the Sea Eagles which breed on the island did not show themselves.

At sea there were good numbers of Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Great Skuas but the demise of the breeding colonies of Guillemots and Razorbills was evident in the almost total absence of these auks. The rough sea was not conducive to spotting cetaceans and unfortunately no whales or dolphins were seen. However the satisfied looks on faces as we disembarked testified as to how much everyone had enjoyed the trip. It was also good to see Canna keeping up with Eigg and Muck by having a nice new modern café, a much appreciated addition since our last visit.

MOTHS *Brian Neath*

The saga of the Square-spotted Clay continued to attract attention during 2006. (See the August 2004 Newsletter) A return visit by Robin Field and Tom Prescott to Carr Brae in March failed to locate any caterpillars of this species despite a determined search over two evenings assisted by Barbara Soutar, Jane Bowman and myself. None were found during searches at the other known sites in Argyll either. However Tom returned in late July to attempt to trap adults both on Carr Brae and at a site near Inverinate identified as potential Square-spotted Clay habitat by Robin in March. The four traps set on 26th July attracted five adult Square-spotted Clay, three of these being in our garden and one being at Inverinate, which is a new 10km square for this Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species. Subsequently I trapped two further adults in our garden on 3rd and 13th August. Bearing in mind that only two adults had been seen prior to 2006 these results were highly significant. The mystery remains however about the feeding habits of the elusive caterpillars. The four traps attracted an impressive 85 species of macro-moth altogether.

Moth-trapping on Carr Brae and on the Balmacara Estate has confirmed that several species are spreading northwards into the Highlands. The V-Pug, the Satin Beauty, the Scorched Wing and the Clouded Silver all seem to have established themselves in the Lochalsh area in the last two years. The first two species were particularly numerous this year.

There have been many other interesting moth sightings during the year including an Orange Underwing seen by Barbara Soutar at Duirinish Lodge on 5th May, a dead Convolvulous Hawk-moth at Badicaul in August, a Manchester Treble-bar trapped at Drumbuie by Ishbel Cameron on 7th August, a Hummingbird Hawk-moth seen by Davy Croy at Inverinate on 16th September and another Convolvulous Hawk-moth at Donald MacIntosh's garden

centre at Inverinate on 23rd September. The Hummingbird Hawk-moth may well have been a “first” for Lochalsh although this fascinating insect has become a more frequent visitor to southern and eastern Scotland in recent years so one was overdue in the north-west Highlands. Subsequently I have heard of three more Hummingbird Hawk-moths, one at Glenelg (Jean and Brian Saville) and two at Lochcarron (via Josephine Dean).

I have now taken on the role of moth recorder for Wester Ross (Vice-County 105) so would be pleased to hear of any interesting moth sightings. Please phone me on 01599 555 341 or e-mail brian@culag.plus.com with the appropriate details. Digital photos are particularly useful to confirm identifications.

BUTTERFLIES

The Peacock butterfly has further established itself as a Lochalsh species with an unprecedented number of sightings. I recorded three on my transect on Carr Brae on 8th September and another on 15th September, with earlier sightings in Dornie and at Avernish. Prior to 2006 I had only two personal records of singles in Lochalsh. The latest sighting that I know of was by Ishbel Cameron at Drumbuie on 15th October. Any additional records of this spectacular butterfly would be welcomed. The Peacock is now numerous in the Moray Firth area, Glen Moriston and Argyll and the expansion of range in these areas in the short period since the 2000 Atlas is truly staggering.

The Grayling is our most elusive resident butterfly so it was interesting to hear of one which settled on someone's clothing in Kyle on 14th August and was subsequently identified by Ishbel Cameron. The rocky coastline between Kyle and Plockton is the most likely habitat in which to find this exclusively coastal butterfly and July and August are the best months to look out for them.

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS DURING LATE SUMMER/EARLY AUTUMN

Despite the low numbers of seabirds reported in the June newsletter and the absence of auks noted during the boat trip to Canna there was an unprecedented influx of Razorbills and Puffins into Loch Carron in between these dates. These were observed by many people sailing out from Plockton and were an added bonus to those enjoying Calum's seal boat trips. There were hundreds of auks off the coast between Drumbuie and Port-an-eorna on 26th June, 29th June, 15th and 16th July. The majority were Razorbills but Guillemot numbers had increased by the last date when there were also at least 20 Puffins. Whilst it was good to be able to watch these seabirds from the Lochalsh shore it was worrying that the birds were not on their breeding cliffs on the Small Isles following two years of very poor breeding success. One intriguing record involved an adult Razorbill with a half-grown chick close to the shore at Reraig on 28th July. This small chick must have swum an awful long way to reach Reraig, the nearest possible breeding ledges being on the south coast of Applecross.

A more encouraging seabird event was the return of breeding terns to Glas Eilean, the island off Avernish, after an absence of many years. At least 120 birds were noted there on 15th and 30th July, mostly Common Terns but with one or two Arctic Terns also identified. It was difficult to assess their breeding success due to the distance from the Avernish shore but some juveniles were observed on 30th July and 18th August. It will be interesting to see whether the birds return next year. Terns are vulnerable to predation from the Mink that are now present in the area.

A Kingfisher has been seen recently along the River Croe at Morvich by the NTS rangers. Following sightings at Nostie, Glenelg and Lochcarron in recent years it is perhaps only a matter of time before this splendid bird is found to be breeding locally.

Two recently reported mammal sightings involve a Fox seen by Charlene MacLeod near Loch Palascaig on 27th September and a Badger which appeared in the garden of Mr and Mrs Nicolson in Plockton during October. It was sad to see so many Roe Deer road casualties along the A87 between Nostie and Kyle this year although this may reflect increasing numbers of this attractive deer.

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