

NEWSLETTER 59 - FEBRUARY 2008

THE WEATHER IN 2007

2007 was generally noted for its disappointing summer. The weather statistics from Reraig confirm that August and September were cooler than usual but suggest that on the whole the year was not too different from the average except for the continuing trend of slowly rising temperatures. The figures in brackets are the average readings at Reraig for the period 1985 to 2005.

	Rainfall		Temperature (Celsius)	
	mm	ins	ave max	ave min
January	379	14.92 (9.29)	8.94 (7.84)	3.52 (1.90)
February	136	5.35 (7.72)	9.64 (8.40)	2.50 (1.46)
March	219	8.62 (7.80)	11.03 (10.00)	2.90 (2.50)
April	88	3.46 (4.21)	15.20 (12.19)	5.23 (3.62)
May	189	7.44 (3.43)	14.87 (15.67)	6.55 (5.86)
June	81	3.19 (3.98)	19.17 (17.21)	8.87 (8.03)
July	107	4.21 (4.17)	18.65 (18.56)	9.94 (9.77)
August	167	6.57 (5.28)	17.94 (18.61)	9.45 (9.73)
September	155	6.10 (6.34)	15.31 (16.57)	7.84 (8.01)
October	163	6.42 (7.95)	15.14 (13.38)	7.97 (6.01)
November	187	7.36 (7.95)	10.80 (10.17)	4.63 (3.56)
December	244	9.61 (8.23)	9.00 (8.12)	2.27 (1.92)
Totals	2115	83.27 (76.42)		

January was the wettest month with 161% of the average January rainfall for the years 1985 to 2005. However May with 217% of the 21 year average was the month with the greatest deviation from the norm. February with only 69% of the average rainfall was statistically the “best” month, the rainfall in the other nine months varying between 81% and 125% of the average figures. The unpredictability of the weather in the north west Highlands can be highlighted by the vast range of the monthly rainfall over the 23 year period of the Reraig statistics. The table below shows the minimum and maximum amounts of rain recorded per month since 1985.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
36mm	0mm	69mm	31mm	27mm	39mm	41mm	57mm	35mm	49mm	97mm	28mm	1550mm
459mm	456mm	458mm	219mm	276mm	172mm	172mm	287mm	303mm	344mm	389mm	385mm	2553mm

It is interesting to note that none of these extreme figures occurred within the last four years. However the years 2004 to 2007 were the only four consecutive years in which the annual rainfall exceeded 2100mm. It is also interesting that none of the four driest months on record (February 1986, May 1991, December 1995 and April 2003) occurred during the summer. The wettest day of the year was 26th December with 44mm closely followed by 13th January with 43mm and four other days with more than 40mm (14th January, 27th February, 3rd August and 15th September).

As can be seen from the above figures the average maximum temperatures exceeded the long term averages in all months except May, August and September, while the average minimum temperatures exceeded the long term averages in all months except August and September. The hottest day of the year was 8th June (26 degrees) while the lowest temperatures were recorded on 7th February (-7 degrees) and 22nd December (-4 degrees). During July and August the temperature exceeded 21 degrees on only four days, two in each month.

Many thanks as always to Duncan Glen-Riddell for providing the weather statistics from Reraig House.

MEMBERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

There was a limited response to the questionnaire sent out to members with the September newsletter. Hopefully this indicates a general satisfaction with the way the committee is running the Field Club. However it has not helped James Merryweather to any great extent with the planning of field meetings which was one of the main objectives.

There was broad support for the four main subjects covered by the constitution – natural history, geology, archaeology and history - with natural history just ahead of the other three in respect of members' “keen interest”.

Only one member was dissatisfied with the balance of subjects covered by our programme of lectures but there were several requests for greater coverage of geology, archaeology and history. Two members volunteered “reluctantly” to give talks on these subjects and there were some useful suggestions for other possible speakers.

Everyone thought that we should have a programme of outdoor meetings but no-one volunteered to lead one. There were requests for visits to local geological and archaeological sites. Some members would prefer weekdays for such outings, others prefer week-ends, but Saturday would seem to suit most of those who completed the questionnaire.

All participants were satisfied with the contents of the newsletters but again would like some coverage of geology, archaeology and history. Other suggestions included reports on field outings, flora, short contributions from members and news from a larger part of Wester Ross.

As editor I always request short articles at the end of the newsletters but so far none have been forthcoming. The newsletters inevitably reflect my own interests but I would be delighted to have contributions on other subjects from members. Now that the programme is issued separately by James rather than being included in the newsletters I do sometimes have difficulty in filling the space available. So do please send in items for inclusion.

Many thanks to all those who took the trouble to complete the questionnaire.

THE LITTLE GREBE

One of the birds whose presence in the north west Highlands continues to surprise me is the Little Grebe. Nothing you might read in bird books about this species would suggest that you could find this smallest member of the grebe family around the coast of Lochalsh during the winter months. They breed on ponds, gravel pits, lakes, canals and slow moving rivers and winter on large reservoirs, sheltered coastal waters and estuaries and are very much "lowland" birds. However Little Grebes are in fact quite common in winter at the head of Loch Duich, throughout Loch Long, all along the coast from Ardelve to Balmacara Bay and most surprisingly of all around the rocky coast from Kyle to Duncraig. One or two birds winter every year in the tidal pool at Glenelg and they can also be found in Loch Carron and Loch Kishorn. Admittedly the numbers are not large at any one site but the total number between Glenelg and Kishorn must be quite significant. Ardelve usually has the largest concentration with about eight birds and there are often six or so at the head of Loch Duich. The biggest mystery is where these birds breed. Little Grebes reappear at Ardelve in July or August so it is unlikely that they are immigrants from the continent or Scandinavia. Most of the freshwater lochs are too acidic and I know of only two small lochs where they have bred in Lochalsh. They do breed on Skye but they also winter around Skye and it is unlikely that the Skye breeding population could account for the number of birds wintering along the mainland coast. If you see a small dumpy brown bird with a fluffy paler rear diving continuously close to the shore it will almost certainly be a Little Grebe. Unlike the larger grebe species it does not acquire a spectacular breeding plumage but it does become much darker with chestnut colouring on the head.

WILDLIFE REPORTS

Following my request for records of Bullfinches feeding on peanuts Carol Weale phoned to say that they have had Bullfinches feeding both at their temporary residence in Badicaul and at their new house in Erbusaig. Jessie MacGregor also continues to have Bullfinches feeding on peanuts from time to time in her garden in Kyle. It will be interesting to see how long it takes for this habit to spread from the Kyle/Erbusaig area to other parts of Lochalsh. Please keep a look out for this behaviour in your own garden. I would also be interested to hear from anyone who has Long-tailed Tits feeding on peanuts or fat balls etc.

One or more immature White-tailed Sea Eagles have appeared in the Loch Duich area recently with sightings at the head of the loch, at Inverinate and on Carr Brae. On 17th February I was surprised to see one over Carr Brae View Point carrying a stick in its talons as it headed off towards Loch Alsh. Alison MacLennan informs me that immature eagles have been known to build nests on Skye - but Carr Brae seems a long way to come for one stick!

I was pleased to see 13 Goldeneye on Loch Achaidh na h-Inich on 11th February with another pair on nearby Loch Lundie. This attractive diving duck has become much scarcer in the coastal waters in the Plockton area and at the head of Loch Duich in the last few years so it was good to see them still using Loch Achaidh na h-Inich which has always been a favourite site.

A solitary Waxwing at Avernish was a surprise find on 7th January as the 2007/2008 winter has not been a Waxwing winter.

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