



South West Ross Field Club

NEWSLETTER 60 - MAY 2008

NATIONAL MOTH NIGHT

Every year Butterfly Conservation in conjunction with the magazine *Atropos* organises a National Moth Night. All moth recorders are encouraged to run their traps on the same night and local groups are asked to organise events to show the public the amazing variety and beauty of the moths occurring in their local area. This year National Moth Night has been planned for Saturday 7th June. Barbara Soutar of the National Trust for Scotland and Brian Neath, Vice County Moth Recorder for Wester Ross and Skye, are planning to organise an event based at the Lochalsh Woodland Park (the former camp site). It is hoped to search for day-flying moths on the Saturday afternoon and traps will be set over Saturday night for examination of the contents on Sunday morning. *Argent & Sable* (right) is one of the moths we hope to see. If you wish to attend on either Saturday or Sunday please contact Barbara on 0844 493 2233 or Brian on 01599 555 341.



Photo by Andy Law

GARDEN BIRDS

Bill Ramsay is the latest member to report Bullfinches feeding on peanuts in his garden. This is still within the area from Kyle to Erbusaig where this behaviour has been noted previously so please keep an eye open for this habit spreading into other parts of Lochalsh. Although I frequently have Bullfinches in our garden on Carr Brae I have never seen them show any interest in either the seeds or peanuts that I put out for the birds.

Ishbel Cameron continues to have good numbers of Yellowhammers feeding in her garden at Drumbuie and she was pleased to have three male and one female Reed Buntings join them during March. Ishbel's garden is also one of the few in Lochalsh to attract Rock Doves. This species is much more widespread on Skye and has become a frequent visitor to gardens in some parts of the island. It has even been reported balancing on seed feeders which is hard to imagine for a bird of its size.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is another bird which has become increasingly attracted to garden peanut feeders. It is such a regular visitor to our garden on Carr Brae that I tend to forget that I only had my first feeding woodpecker in April 2001. Eleanor and Hubert Hunton's garden at Coillimore and Maud and Roger Tuffts' garden at Achnandarach are the latest gardens to have Great Spotted Woodpeckers coming to feed. The Goldfinch is also becoming more frequent as a garden feeding bird and Rosemary McClelland (Ardelve), Ishbel Cameron (Drumbue), Hugh Davies (Kyleakin), Moira and Adrian Quinn (Conchra) and Roddie MacLeod (Inverinate) are amongst those who have reported this beautiful bird in their garden this year.

BIRD ATLAS 2007-2011

The field work for the new atlas is progressing at a phenomenal rate. Over 30 million birds of 409 species have already been recorded by more than 7000 on-line users. My own observations in the 11 tetrads I am surveying in the first year have produced some interesting records. Amongst the highlights has been seeing all three species of diver on the one day in the Glenelg/Sandaig area on both 10th February and 15th May. On the latter date all three species were in their splendid breeding plumage, a Great Northern Diver and a Black-throated Diver close to the Sandaig Islands and a pair of Red-throated Divers on a small freshwater loch.

The Sandaig forestry plantation is a hot spot for Crossbills and I saw 35 there on 11th December, 17 on 10th February and four on 15th May.

Twite usually leave the area in winter but I saw 10 in Kirkton Bay on 3rd November and 25 there on 11th January along with about 12 Goldfinches. An excellent flock of 20 Goldfinches had been seen earlier on the shore at Glenelg on 8th December.

Reed Buntings were recorded in a surprising number of localities including 6 at Avernish on 9th November, one by the

Lochalsh Dam on 15th November, three at Ardelve on 16th January and two near Balmacara Square on 29th January. Disappointingly I have not yet recorded any Reed Buntings during the breeding season.

Woodcock were flushed at Sandaig, Balmacara forestry plantation and on Carr Brae, while my only Jack Snipe of the winter was seen on Carr Brae on 22nd January.

The tetrads with the most species recorded during the winter months were at Ardelve (47 species) and Nostie/Avernish (45 species). The tetrads with the least species were squares which contained no stretches of coastline such as those at Lochalsh Dam (14 species) and near Upper Sandaig which produced only seven species.

Fieldwork for the early breeding season visits is to be completed by the end of May. At the halfway stage the most productive tetrads have been at Dornie/Bundaloch (42 species) and Glenelg/Glen Bernera (37 species).

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

During an exceptionally mild spell several butterflies were recorded in the Highlands in February this year including a Red Admiral seen by Davy Croy on Carr Brae. However subsequently it proved to be a late and slow moving season with few butterflies reported by the end of April. Barbara Soutar saw the first Small Tortoiseshell at Scalpaidh on 16th April and Roger Knight saw a Peacock and two Red Admirals in the Lochalsh Woodland Garden on 20th April. Otherwise there were only one or two sightings of Green-veined White, one other Small Tortoiseshell and then a Speckled Wood on the last day of the month.

Early May produced good numbers of Orange-tips and Ishbel Cameron saw at least 20 in the Duirinish/Achnandarach area on the 5th. Numbers of other species remained disappointingly low considering the long spell of dry sunny weather. However I recorded 13 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries on my Carr Brae transect on 11th May and it seemed strange for this rare species to be the most numerous butterfly on Carr Brae. Six Small Heath on the transect on 14th were rather early, bucking the general trend of a late season. Green Hairstreak and Speckled Wood numbers remained low.

Eleanor and Hubert Hunton found a Small Tortoiseshell trapped in a spider's web indoors on 1st May and after carefully extracting it from the web they were delighted to find that it was able to fly away with just a small piece missing from one wing.

Some good bird counts this year included 28 Cormorants on Sheep Island, Dornie on 3rd January, 150 Wigeon in Kirkton Bay on 11th January, 50 Teal at Reraig on 27th February, 23 Ringed Plover at Glenelg on 10th February, 35 Turnstone at Glenelg on 5th February, about 40 Coal Tits along the Loch Achaidh na h-Inich/Loch Lundie circular walk on 11th February and 44 Black Guillemots off the Plock of Kyle on 9th April.

Sandaig is not the only locality where Crossbills have been seen. There was at least one near Loch Lundie on 11th February and Irene Gibson saw two in Gleann Udalain on 17th February.

April is always an exciting month as the first of the summer migrants arrive. It appears to be a good year for Cuckoos, Swallows and Willow Warblers and there are good numbers of Sand Martins at the colonies in Gleann Beag and Glen Bernera. The last week of April saw the arrival of Tree Pipits, Redstarts, Grasshopper Warblers, Blackcaps and Wood Warblers then the first week of May brought in the Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers. So far it seems to be a disappointing year for House Martins and Whinchats but House Martins do sometimes arrive very late as do Spotted Flycatchers. It will also be interesting to see whether the Common and Arctic Terns reappear on Glas Eilean after the last two successful years.

The colourful displays of wildflowers and shrubs seem to get better every year. Gorse was in flower throughout the winter but was still able to put on a fantastic display during April and into May when Broom began to take over the banks of bright golden yellow. Primroses and Bluebells seem to become more conspicuous every year and this year I have seen dense patches of both in places where I don't remember seeing them before. Perhaps the long spell of sunny weather has made them more obvious than usual although I often think that Primroses show up even better on overcast days.

Coltsfoot is one of the earliest wildflowers to appear and I always look out for the patch near Dornie Hall where I found it in flower on 4th March this year. Another local plant on the mainland is Ramsons (or Wild Garlic) although it is prolific in Sleat and especially at Armadale. I found a small patch on the Inverinate side of Carr Brae a few years ago and first noticed it in flower on 8th May. Marsh Marigold, Cuckooflower, Lousewort and Thrift have all produced fine displays so far and Common Birds-foot-trefoil is on the point of taking over many of the roadside verges at the time of writing whilst the Hawthorn blossom is at its beautiful best just now.

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An archive section is about to be added to our website. All newsletters from No.14 August 1996 to No.59 February 2008 will be included initially with Nos. 1 to 13 being added in due course. A section on local archaeology and history will also be created and this will incorporate some of Bill Ramsay's researches including the Ardintoul talc mine and the Carr Brae gold mine. Please spread the word about our website and let the Committee know of any suggestions you may have for further additions or improvements.