



NEWSLETTER 61 – AUGUST 2008

PROGRAMME OF TALKS 2008 – 2009 (as agreed at the AGM evening talks will commence at 7.30 pm)

Friday, 19 September 2008
*Welcome return of a
 popular 2007 speaker*

TALK John McMillan
EASTER ISLAND
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Friday, 31 October 2008
 UACLL
17th c. harvest failure in Tayside

TALK Karen Cullen (UHI)
ILL YEARS OF THE 1690s
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Friday, 28 November 2008
 UACLL

TALK Stephen Birch
HIGH PASTURE CAVE – latest
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Thursday, 18 December 2008
 The SWRFC Christmas Lecture

TALK James Merryweather
BAGPIPES WITH TWO ! CHANTERS
Illustrated with pictures, 16th c. clothing and live music
 Achmore Village Hall at 2.30 pm

N.B. Thursday afternoon at ...

Friday, 16 January 2009
*10 years of the Highland Council
 Ranger service in Skye & Lochalsh*

TALK John Phillips (Highland Ranger, Skye & Lochalsh)
BIODIVERSITY AND PEOPLE
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Friday, 20 February 2009

TALK Peter Cunningham (Wester Ross Fisheries)
THE RIVERS OF WESTER ROSS
(and adjacent areas.....) and their fish life
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Friday, 6 March 2009
 UACLL

TALK Kenny Taylor (SNH)
AURORAS
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Friday, 10 April 2009
Otters, badgers etc. of course

TALK Roger Cottis
***A SAFE PASSAGE FOR ALL:
 Wildlife Mitigation Measures***
 Kirkton Church Hall at 7.30 pm

Admission is free to SWRFC members and £2 to non-members, except **UACLL** talks which are arranged in conjunction with University of Aberdeen Centre for Lifelong Learning for which members are charged a nominal £1 (non-members £3).

BIRD ATLAS UPDATE

At the end of the first full year of atlas fieldwork a staggering 44 million birds of 457 species had been recorded by more than 8800 on-line recorders. It was interesting to note that fewer tetrads had been surveyed during the breeding season (12162) than during the winter period (15818) and presumably this reflects the poor weather during the summer over much of the British Isles.

We have been more fortunate in the Highlands with less rain than usual and none of the flooding that has occurred elsewhere. As a result the small band of observers in the area have managed to achieve relatively good coverage. 10 kilometre square NG71 spans across the Sound of Sleat and includes Isleornsay and Ben Aslak on Skye and the Sandaig area on the mainland. 53 species were recorded there between November and February and 87 species between April and July. NG82 stretches from Balmacara to Bundaloch along its northern edge and as far south as Galltair and Glen Bernera. 73 species were recorded during the winter period and 85 species during the breeding season. NG91 includes the Five Sisters, part of the South Shiel ridge and Mam Ratagan. It is therefore mostly mountainous but includes a small area of Loch Duich between Ratagan and Shiel Bridge. Despite being mainly upland habitat an impressive 51 species were recorded between November and February and 64 species between April and July.

Anyone who feels competent in identifying birds can participate, especially if they are familiar with bird calls and songs. See www.bto.org/birdatlas for details of tetrads which are still to be surveyed. Casual records can also be submitted either on-line or on paper forms. The project will last a further three years and fieldwork will commence again in November.

NATIONAL MOTH NIGHT

Every year Butterfly Conservation in conjunction with the magazine ATROPOS organizes a National Moth Night in which everyone who is interested in moths is encouraged to run their moth traps and submit their results to the scheme. The date varies from year to year and usually there are one or two species which moth enthusiasts are encouraged to target. The results are published in Atropos and give a snapshot record of all the moth species occurring in the British Isles on the one night. The report for National Moth Night 2007 (11th August) showed that 887 species were recorded from 761 sites across the UK and Ireland despite most recorders considering it to have been a poor year for moths. In 2008 a National Moth Night *and Day* was specified for the first time and the date chosen was 7th June. It was also the first year that anyone in Lochalsh had participated in the project. Barbara Soutar and Brian Neath organised public events at Scalpaidh and Lochalsh Woodland Park and traps were also run at Carr Brae (Brian Neath) and Plockton (Dr Iain Matheson). Altogether a total of 69 species of macro-moths was recorded in the area (the difficult micro-moths are also included in the national scheme). Highlights included Peach Blossom, Saxon, Clouded Silver and Scorched Wing at Carr Brae, Ghost Moth, Gold Swift, Tawny-barred Angle and Green Silver-lines at Balmacara and Red Carpet and Willow Beauty at Plockton. Common but spectacular moths included Buff-tip, Poplar Hawk-moth and Lesser Swallow Prominent. We failed to spot a definite Argent & Sable at Scalpaidh but did see Clouded Buff and Smoky Wave there as well as about 10 Large Heath butterflies and two Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

Two Common Dolphins have been entertaining people in Loch Carron for much of the year and Calum's Seal Boat has been making special trips up the loch to view them. Further west between Broadford Bay and the Inner Sound large numbers of dolphins were present in early June, probably also Common Dolphins, while off the north end of Skye it has been a good year for sightings of Basking Sharks and Minke Whales.

At the opposite end of the mammal scale I was surprised to find a dead Water Shrew in our garden on 30th May. My only other record of a Water Shrew also involved a dead individual which I found on the road to Arnisdale on exactly the same date in 1998! Josephine Dean has occasionally seen live Water Shrews in her garden at Lochcarron but there seem to be relatively few sightings of this species in the area. A Badger which had become a regular visitor to gardens at Achnandarach unfortunately became a road casualty on the Duirinish to Loch Lundie road.

Dave Hardy was one of the fishermen who witnessed the large numbers of dolphins off Broadford Bay and he has also had an interesting experience with a Great Skua. This skua has been accompanying Dave's boat on many occasions over a period of nine months and taking fish scraps thrown out for it. It is unusual for skuas to remain in the area through the winter months as they usually migrate to the Bay of Biscay or disperse out into the Atlantic Ocean. It has now become so used to Dave that he has recently persuaded it to take fish from his hand.

A LICHEN NEW TO EUROPE

The August 2008 edition of British Wildlife magazine reports the finding of *Micarea prasinella* in late April on the Dundonnell Estate in Wester Ross by Dave Genny of SNH. The lichen's previously known distribution includes Tasmania, New Zealand, southern Chile, Alaska and Oregon. It is an interesting coincidence that the specimen of *Micarea prasinella* in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh was collected by the late Professor Douglas Henderson in New Zealand. Douglas was closely associated with Wester Ross and wrote the Annotated Checklist of the Flora of Wester Ross in 1991 with a second edition in 1992.