



NEWSLETTER 66 - NOVEMBER 2009

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions are overdue for the 2009/2010 season. If you have not yet paid please send your subscription to Vi Beaton, Shalloy, Kyle, IV40 8BL. The membership subscription is £12.50 for an individual and £17:50 for family membership.

PROGRAMME

Friday, 18th December 2009

Problem? What Problem?
That beautiful thug: *Rhododendron ponticum*
Dr James Merryweather

Friday, 15th January 2010

As Busy as a.....
Audrey Sinclair

All meetings will be held at Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 07:30pm. Programme for February, March and April still to be arranged. Suggestions and/or volunteers welcome.

BUTTERFLIES

As anticipated the autumn produced record numbers of Peacock butterflies. I was able to submit 45 records to David Barbour, the butterfly recorder for Highland, for the period 25th July to 5th October. These included records from Jean Saville, Ishbel Cameron, Josephine Dean, Pat Mucklow and Roger Knight. The highest counts were of 23 along the Balmacara Forest track on 22nd August and 17 on Carr Brae on 12th September. It is hard to believe now that as recently as 2006 this was still a rare butterfly in Lochalsh. However Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell remained scarce throughout late summer and autumn although Ishbel Cameron continued to see a few Small Tortoiseshell until 14th September.

Scotch Argus continued to dominate during August and peaked at 84 on the Carr Brae transect on 13th August with large numbers also present along the Balmacara Forest track on 7th and 22nd.

The Speckled Wood was common right through until 16th September followed by an exceptionally late one at Conchra on 4th October. There was also a Red Admiral at the same sheltered sunny site on the same day. The last butterfly to be reported was Jean Saville's Peacock at Glenelg on 5th October. If anyone has any later records I would be pleased to receive details. In the Moray Firth area, and even in the Kingussie area, better weather than we experienced in the west resulted in Red Admirals being seen through late October and up until 7th November.

THE RED KITE

The Red Kite has been re-introduced into many parts of Scotland and England and is now a common sight in many places, even along the M40 motorway in the High Wycombe area. We tend to be familiar with seeing Red Kites along the A832 in the Muir of Ord/Tore area but there are still relatively few

sightings in Lochalsh. Sadly the birds are still persecuted in the Black Isle and this population has not increased as dramatically as in other areas. However there have been at least three sightings locally this year with birds seen on the Mam Ratagan, in Gleann Lichd and at Dubh-aird, Plockton. With the lack of Rabbits in our area it seems unlikely that the Red Kite will colonise Lochalsh but it is worth keeping a look out for this spectacular raptor.

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

It was good to see terns present in numbers again on Glas Eilean, the island off Avernish. On 29th July there were about 120 terns on and around the island with both Common and Arctic Terns identified and at least one bird seen to be carrying food back for its chicks. However even with a telescope it was difficult to judge how successful a breeding season it had been. There was also a good colony of terns on Sgeir a'Chinn and Sgeir Bhuidhe, two rocky islands in Loch Carron which could be seen during Calum's seal boat trips.

That other re-introduced bird of prey the White-tailed Sea Eagle created a spectacular scene on 12th September when an immature bird disturbed the local Heron population and no fewer than 30 Herons could be seen circling around above the eagle near to Eilean Donan. Later in the day what was presumably the same eagle soared low over our garden on Carr Brae still with two Herons in attendance.

Also in the Eilean Donan area on the same day there was an unprecedented influx of Razorbills feeding amongst a noisy gathering of gulls. When the the frantic feeding eased off I was able to count about 120 Razorbills strung out in a line with a similar number still present on the 13th. Razorbills and Guillemots are usually more numerous in Outer Loch Carron than in Loch Duich but on the 14th September there were few to be seen. However it was interesting to see a single Manx Shearwater flying up Loch Carron, a bird one usually sees in large groups not singly. During the October gales several Manx Shearwaters were found stranded in Lochcarron, a common problem with young birds of this species.

The summer migrants all seemed to depart early this year and very few were still around in September. I saw a mixed group of Swallows and House Martins gathering on the roof of Auchtertyre School on 2nd September and a single Willow Warbler in our garden on 12th September. That was it apart from two Wheatears of the Greenland race in Kirkton Bay on 30th September. The latter would have been northern birds passing through rather than local breeding birds.

Most of the finches are gregarious birds which gather in flocks after the breeding season. The Bullfinch is perhaps the main exception although even this species can sometimes be seen in groups of ten or so. The largest flocks tend to be of Siskins and Lesser Redpolls and these often gather in mixed flocks. However a flock of 200 to 300 Lesser Redpolls near Loch Iain Oig along the Balmacara to Erbusaig road on 14th September was exceptional and appeared to consist entirely of that species. Dr John Adamson also saw a large flock of Lesser Redpolls in Kyle on 21st October. The Twite is another finch that can be seen in good sized flocks during the autumn both at sea level and high up on mountain ridges. Most seem to leave the area for the main winter period but Alan and Elaine Horner found a flock of 60 at the Kyleakin Obbe on 8th November and there was a flock of at least 21 on the shore at Plockton on 13th November.

Except when they are displaying and “drumming” in the breeding season it is usually necessary to flush Snipe out of their cover to see them. Dr John Adamson often encounters Snipe on the Plock of Kyle during the winter months when walking his dog. However I had the strange experience on 13th November of suddenly being aware of a Snipe flying parallel to my car as I drove along the approach road to Duirinish Station. It is certainly not a bird one expects to see from the car.

For up to date news of bird sightings in Skye and Lochalsh see Bob MacMillan's website www.skye-birds.com

