



# South West Ross Field Club

## NEWSLETTER 76 – MAY 2012

**BUTTERFLIES** The butterfly season got off to an early start during the warm spell at the end of March. The first report came from John Rooney with a Peacock at Glaick on 22<sup>nd</sup> and this was followed by more Peacocks at Lochlonghead (Paul Speak), Carr Brae and Drumbuie from 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>. We had as many as five Peacocks in our Carr Brae garden on 26<sup>th</sup>. However the only other species identified during March were two Small Tortoiseshells seen by Paul Speak at Lochlonghead on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

As a result of the change to much cooler weather in April I didn't see a single butterfly during the month. However Hugh and Margaret Scott had better luck and found both Peacocks and Speckled Woods in the Kinloch Woods, Skye on 21<sup>st</sup> April and as many as eight Small Tortoiseshells and 17 Orange-tips in the Killilan area on 29<sup>th</sup>. John Holt had spotted two very early Orange-tips at Reraig on 19<sup>th</sup> April.

Pat Mucklow found good numbers of Orange-tips in the Balmacara area on 1<sup>st</sup> May and both Orange-tip and Green-veined White appeared on Carr Brae on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. Unfortunately a return to cold damp weather then brought butterfly sightings to an end.

**MOTHS** Moths too were seriously affected by the erratic weather patterns. Unlike our butterflies several moth species have their flight season during the winter months. The generally mild weather meant that most of the winter species fared well. Then the fine weather in March resulted in a record 24 species being attracted to our windows and/or moth trap including seven new species for this month. These included attractive moths such as Yellow-barred Brindle, Early Thorn and Scarce Prominent. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March I had a record count of 205 moths of 14 species, a larger count than during the whole of 2011. However the dismal weather in April meant that there were very few suitable nights for moth trapping and the windy weather resulted in very few moths being attracted to the windows. My only moth trapping night of the month on 22<sup>nd</sup> included a Swallow Prominent. As well as being exceptionally early this was only the 13<sup>th</sup> record for Wester Ross of this species.



Scarce Prominent



Early Thorn

**LESSER REDPOLLS** The sale of nyger seed by companies producing garden bird food has resulted in the Lesser Redpoll joining the ranks of birds being attracted to gardens. I hadn't heard of this behaviour having spread to the North West Highlands until this year but there have now been reports of Redpolls at garden bird feeders in Plockton (Jan Storie), at Lochcarron and at several gardens on Skye. Although the Lesser Redpoll is a common bird on Carr Brae and does occur in our garden I have never seen one at our feeding station. This may be because we provide sunflower hearts and mixed seed rather than nyger seed. The Lesser Redpoll is a small brown finch with a red forehead and a small black bib. Some males having an extensive area of pink on the breast. Reports of this behaviour in your garden would be appreciated.

**PIED WAGTAIL** On 28<sup>th</sup> March I saw a pair of Pied Wagtails at Ardelve and noted that the female had coloured plastic rings on its legs, white on the left and red on the right. After extensive e-mail correspondence it appears that this was almost certainly a bird that had been ringed on a pier on the Isle of Wight some four or five years ago. Apparently there is roost of several hundred wagtails on this pier and many of them had been caught and ringed. Although the Pied Wagtail is not a migratory bird in the usual sense most of our breeding birds desert the Highlands for more lowland habitats during the winter months and it is interesting to note that they could travel as far as the south coast of Britain.

**SUMMER MIGRANTS** It must have been one of the most unusual years for the arrival of summer migrants. Some exceptionally early arrivals occurred on Skye during March including Wheatear on 18<sup>th</sup> March, Common Sandpiper on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, House Martin on 24<sup>th</sup> March, Sand Martin on 25<sup>th</sup> March, Chiffchaff on 26<sup>th</sup> March and Swallow on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Yet the deterioration in the weather resulted in some of these birds remaining scarce throughout April. With fewer people recording birds in Lochalsh than Skye there were no March reports of any summer migrants on the mainland. The first reports were of two Wheatears on Carr Brae on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and two Chiffchaffs at Plockton on 4<sup>th</sup> April. The 13<sup>th</sup> April saw a Willow Warbler on Carr Brae and a Chiffchaff at the Lochalsh Woodland Walks. The 19<sup>th</sup> produced Swallow in Kyle, Common Sandpiper at the head of Loch Long and Tree Pipit on Carr Brae. The first Cuckoo was reported at Sandaig on the early date of 15<sup>th</sup> April followed by one near Letterfearn on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Subsequently Cuckoos have been widespread and we don't seem to have the shortage of this species reported over much of southern Britain.

The Willow Warbler is undoubtedly the most numerous of our summer visitors and the Blackcap may now be the second commonest with singing birds present in most wooded areas. The Swallow is probably the only other contender for second place but numbers remained very low during April and many traditional sites were not occupied until the second half of May. At the time of writing, 28<sup>th</sup> May, I have still not seen a House Martin in Lochalsh.

**OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS** Common Dolphins rarely venture into our sea lochs but are frequently seen around Skye and the Small Isles. However the sighting of c.100 off Elgol on 8<sup>th</sup> May was exceptional and must have been very spectacular. Not only that but a Basking Shark was also present in the same area. Large numbers of dolphins were present again on 26<sup>th</sup> May.

The mainland shore is not usually as good for spotting cetaceans but 9 Bottle-nosed Dolphins were spotted off Kyle on 22<sup>nd</sup> May including a juvenile..

The Coot is a widespread resident bird in Britain but is absent from upland areas including the Highlands. It was a surprise therefore when Paul Speak spotted one at the head of Loch Long on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. However there is a breeding population in the Uists and perhaps the Loch Long bird was a wanderer from the islands.