



NEWSLETTER 77 - AUGUST 2012

PROGRAMME

21 st September 2012	The Underground Roadshow: where eelworms dare Dr James Merryweather
19 th October 2012	Birds of the Orkney Islands Eric Meek
9 th November 2012	Improving the Ornithological Profile of Skye and Lochalsh Bob McMillan
7 th December 2012	Nature in Trust: The Work of the National Trust for Scotland Rob Dewar

All meetings will be held at Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 7:30pm

WILDLIFE REPORTS Jan Storie saw at least three Crossbills in Plockton on 2nd July feeding on pine cones. She has had several sightings of Black-throated Diver at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich and also witnessed some interaction between Buzzards, Hooded Crows and a small bird of prey, possibly a Merlin, in the same area. My only sighting of Grey Wagtail this year was at the same loch. This wagtail has been surprisingly scarce since the two hard winters so I would be interested to hear of any sightings elsewhere.

John Rooney was surprised when a House Sparrow came down his chimney in Kyle causing a cloud of soot and was even more surprised when a second sparrow followed shortly after. As the chimney has a cowl he was puzzled how and why the sparrows found their way in.

Roger Knight was equally surprised to have a Peregrine Falcon in his Dornie garden on 28th September. The bird was present for about seven hours, occasionally making a sortie over the adjoining hillside but then returning to the same tree perch. It was very noisy and the assumption is that it was a young bird whose parents had decided it was time for it to fend for itself. Hopefully it has been able to do just that but it has not reappeared in the garden.

BUTTERFLIES It has continued to be a strange year for butterflies. Most people's general assessment is that it has been a very poor year. However I have been able to amass a surprising number of records which indicate that some species have done very well whilst others have been scarce or absent. The successful species have been Green-veined White, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Scotch Argus and Speckled Wood.

On a walk from Nostie to Avernish Point on 25th June I counted 40 butterflies of seven species while on the circular walk from Kyle Rhea to Ardintoul via Galltair on 14th July I found 61 butterflies of five species. There were 14 Common Blue and 16 Speckled Wood on the Avernish walk and 24 Meadow Brown and 27 Speckled Wood on the Ardintoul walk. On 8th August I counted 117 Scotch Argus in a small area of Carr Brae and on 11th August 112 of the same species in the Drumbuie area. On the other hand I haven't seen a single Red Admiral and it has been a poor season for our three fritillary species and Small Heath. Details of any sightings of the Pearl-bordered, Small Pearl-bordered or Dark Green Fritillaries would be appreciated.

The Peacock butterfly has not been as common this year as in recent years so it was good to hear that Jean Camilli found Peacock caterpillars on nettles in her Ratagan garden on 20th July. The flight periods for both Red Admiral and Peacock can extend well into October so please forward any sightings of these species to the e-mail address below.

HIGHLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDING GROUP VISITS TO THE CROWLIN ISLANDS 2012

The HBRG arranged a boat trip from Kyle to the Crowlin Islands on Saturday 9th June. The idea was to put the islands on the biological map by recording as much flora and fauna as possible. The number of passengers was limited to 12 people with a range of identification skills.

My own interests were the birds, butterflies and moths to be found on the islands. Although it was a fine day there was a fresh northerly breeze which meant that butterflies were conspicuous by their absence. A brief glimpse of a possible Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was all that I achieved. It was a similar situation as far as day-flying moths were concerned but several Magpie Moth caterpillars were found plus a Common Wave. Luckily Jimmy McKellar is a whizz with a butterfly net and when we returned to the pick up point he presented me with a few moths that he had netted. One of these was a spectacular Wood Tiger for which there are only a handful of records in the West Ross recording area.

I was able to identify 19 bird species on the island plus a couple of passing Gannets. The main interest was the presence of at least three Great Skuas which were constantly in flight over the island. There was much interaction between the skuas and Great Black-backed Gulls, the most numerous of the gulls present. A pair of Red-throated Divers alternated between the freshwater Loch nan Leac and the sea where they could be heard making their wailing calls. A Red-breasted Merganser was the only duck species seen and Oystercatcher and Common Sandpiper the only waders recorded. The moorland produced the anticipated Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Wheatears and a Cuckoo whilst the few patches of scrub woodland held at least six singing Willow Warblers. Perhaps the biggest surprise was the presence of Lesser Redpolls with their distinctive flight calls.

Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull, Cormorant and Shag, Hooded Crow and Raven accounted for the rest of the recorded species. However during the sail to and from the islands Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin were added to the day's tally of birds seen.

A second visit was made on 28th July when a further nine bird species were added to the list. A female Bullfinch was perhaps the biggest surprise but Great Tit and Dunnock were also unexpected considering the bleak moorland habitat. 3 Stonechat territories each with anxious adults were also a pleasant surprise considering how scarce this species has been since the two hard winters. The other additional species identified were Heron, Snipe, Rock Pipit, Twite and a reeling Grasshopper Warbler. There were still two pairs of Great Skua present although no evidence of breeding and a Common Sandpiper and a Cuckoo were also still present.

A few Meadow Brown butterflies were seen but the most striking feature of the visit was the abundance of Magpie Moths. The island was just alive with these day-flying moths and there must have been thousands present. This was in contrast to the situation in Lochalsh where Magpie Moths have been much scarcer than usual.

LOCHALSH WATCH CLUB Rule Anderson and Gavin Skipper of the National Trust for Scotland have expressed their thanks to the Field Club for the donations given to the Lochalsh Watch Club. The funds have been used to buy a camera trap which during June captured on film Red Deer, Roe Deer, Wood Mouse, Song Thrush and Pine Marten (see below) at Kintail. The Watch Club meetings are being well attended and the camera will also be used as an educational resource at local schools during the winter months.



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Pine Marten at Kintail



Magpie Moth