



NEWSLETTER 84 – OCTOBER 2014

BILL RAMSAY

An appreciation of his life by John G. Adamson

Bill's passing from our midst on September 23rd was of course a great loss to his family, to whom we send our deep sympathy, but also a real loss to his many friends, wide and far, to the local Church and to so many people who shared his interests in so many fields of endeavour.

Bill became a member of the Field Club soon after he came to live in Kyle, in 1973. He was our Chairman from 1991 to 1996, and a valued committee member since then. The South West Ross Field Club owes a great deal to him. His upbringing in a rural environment in Kingussie fostered an extensive knowledge and love of the hills and glens in Badenoch, where his heart always lay. His keen eye and remarkable memory enabled him to acquire an extensive familiarity with every aspect of wildlife. His sheer delight and keen passion for learning anything new in the field was a great inspiration.

The extraordinary diversity and depth of this remarkable man's interests were formidable. His experiences in the Army, training as a professional electrical engineer and long-standing service with the Hydro Electric Board, Open University degree attainment, and many family and social responsibilities all combined to make him the man he was.

Much in demand as a lecturer, locally and also in Inverness, he was able to share some of his knowledge about local and traditional history with the public. He wrote many research papers, all very interesting, and he acquired much information about Field Archaeology, and was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. His studies and love of Gaelic were very close to his heart and of great importance to him.

A deeply committed Christian, the Church was an essential aspect of the fabric of his life. He gave tremendous service in this field too.

It has been one of the privileges of my life to have known Bill as a fine friend.

BIRD REPORTS

Pete Moore heard a Long-eared Owl at Dorusduain during April. As far as I know this was the first record of this elusive owl in Lochalsh. Interestingly Rule Anderson saw two of the closely related Short-eared Owls at Ault a'Chruinn on the 7th April.

A pair of Shelduck on the Shiel Saltings near Ratagan on 25th February was unusual and there were five Razorbills close to the shore near Kintail Lodge and eight Whooper Swans on Loch nan Corr, Inverinate on the same day.

Jan Storie saw a male Goosander on Loch Achaidh na h-Inich on several dates but on 10th March it was a female Goosander that I found on the loch.

There was a returning flock of 18 Skylarks near Duirinish Station on 10th March and 10 Great Northern Divers off the Drumbuie/Port-an-eorna coast on the same day.

A Sparrowhawk made several visits to our garden on Carr Brae during March and on one occasion it flew so close to me from behind that it actually brushed my arm. On another occasion it crashed into a window but appeared to fly off unharmed.

The first Common Sandpiper of the year was reported by Jan Storie at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich on 25th April. Jan also had a Grasshopper Warbler at the same site on the same day and another was heard on Carr Brae on 30th April and 9th May.

The Chiffchaff is an uncommon summer visitor to Lochalsh with Lochalsh Woodland Walks and Attadale Gardens the most frequently occupied sites. However this year singing birds were heard on Carr Brae from 25th April to 27th June and at Nostie on 13th July. Jan Storie also heard one at Achnandarach on 14th June.

The Brambling is an uncommon winter visitor to Lochalsh. Graham Rennie had one at Strathcarron on 5th April and I had a returning bird feeding in our Carr Brae garden on four days from 11th October.

There were 3 Whimbrel at Ardelve on 6th May and at least 4 noisy Greenshank in Kishorn Bay on 8th May.

It appeared to be a good year for terns with c.60 on and around Glas Eilean, off Avernish on 13th July and hundreds seen from Calum's boat on and around the islands to the north of Plockton on 28th July. The terns at Glas Eilean are usually Common Terns while Arctic Terns are dominant in Loch Carron.

The Whitethroat is a fairly common summer visiting warbler but not known as a regular garden bird. So it was a pleasant surprise to have one in our Carr Brae garden on 15th August.

Jan Storie's frequent visits to Loch Achaidh na h-Inich have resulted in numerous interesting records. Her many records of Cuckoos included no fewer than seven on 19th May! She also saw one or two Black-throated Divers on many occasions. This is unusual as Black-throated Divers are usually resident on their breeding lochs during the breeding season. It has been a particularly good year in Lochalsh for this diver with young reared on the Kintail Estate and at Loch Cluanie for the first time for many years. Why the Achaidh na h-Inich birds should have been intermittently visiting the loch is puzzling unless they are immature birds prospecting for a breeding site. I suspect that the crannog would be a rather vulnerable site.

Grey Wagtails seem to be recovering from their low numbers following the two hard winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. Jan saw a pair frequently at Achaidh na h-Inich and Rule Anderson has had good numbers on the Kintail Estate. However they are still missing from some former haunts.

Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher are two more species which seem to be decreasing so it was good to have records of Whinchat from Achnahinich and Carr Brae and of Spotted Flycatcher from Dorusduain and Kirkton. There was a pair of flycatchers with three juveniles at the latter site on 15th July.

Off the Shiel Saltings near Ratagan on 15th August there were already seven returning Little Grebes and also a good post-breeding flock of 26 Goosanders. Little Grebes spend the breeding season on small freshwater lochs but spend the autumn and winter at coastal sites throughout Lochalsh.

BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

Whilst nationwide it has been reported as a good butterfly year it cannot be said that this applies to Lochalsh. Only Green-veined White has been reasonably common in our area. The Peacock has been widely reported but not in the numbers we have come to expect in recent years. The same applies to Speckled Wood and Scotch Argus. I did see 15 Speckled Wood along the Nostie/Avernish road on 13th July and 15 Scotch Argus at Rubha Mor, Plockton on 28th July but these were the exceptions rather than the norm. John Rooney usually has good numbers visiting his Kyle garden but he has seen very few this year.

By contrast moth recorders in West Ross and Skye have had an excellent year. I had the first Brindled Beauty for West Ross on 28th April. The first two Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moths for Skye were recorded by Dorothy Jackson at Ord and by Terry Swainbank at Ard Dorch. Andy Law had the first Lunar Hornet Moth for Skye at Kyle Rhea, Steve Terry the first Bedstraw Hawk-moth for Skye and Stephen Bungard the first White-line Dart for Raasay. Ishbel Cameron recorded the first Lime-speck Pug for West Ross at Drumbuie in July. So the growing band of moth recorders is really putting Lochalsh and Skye on the map. I will include photos of some of the more spectacular moths in the next newsletter.