



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2006

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(Newsletter Editor)

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GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:

<http://www.gnhs.freeuk.com/>

THOUGHTS ON BIRD 'FLU - Corrigendum

Norman Grist

I lost some text in my "THOUGHTS ON BIRD FLU" in the Dec. 2005 Newsletter.

In the virus designations "N" does NOT signify "nucleoprotein" but "neuramidinase".

From Line 8 the text of the second paragraph should read thus:

"species. Subtypes are identified by their "H" and "N" components: H = Haemagglutinin, involved in attaching virus to cell surface; N = Neuramidinase, an enzyme to breakdown mucinous secretions and permit the virus to reach and infect its target living cells."

Influenza nucleoprotein in this case is RNA, specifying the composition of the virus. Chance errors in replication of RNA during multiplication cause random variations expressed in the antigenic "drift" that requires influenza vaccines to be changed from time to time.

And addendum:

...A crumb of comfort may be that the N1 antigen has been around for over 70 years, probably longer, with a useful legacy of some protective immunity in much of our population to ameliorate an attack by H5N1 virus.

Apologies for my careless error

CHRISTMAS DINNER 2005

Another superb meal was arranged by Hazel at the Glasgow University Staff Club. Our after dinner speaker was our own June Mackay, who led us on a botanising tour of Sichuan in China, and showed many excellent plant photographs. June expresses her thanks to Norman Tait who helped to put the tricky bits of the presentation together. Without his assistance it could never have happened.

ARDMORE

Ian C McCallum

Several years ago the Society carried out an extended survey of the Botanic Gardens which covered almost all aspects of natural history. I would suggest that the time has come to follow up with an extended survey of Ardmore Point.

In 1966 the SWT and the Trustees of Ardmore established a Wildlife Reserve over the promontory as a Reserve under Agreement. This lasted until there was a breakdown in the agreement. They produced an excellent booklet in 1970. The Universities have used the Point for teaching students various aspects of ecology.

Since 1970 the Clyde has become a relatively clean river and this is reflected in the increase of bird records on the SOC Grapevine and on sea-mammal sightings. There have been many Society outings to Ardmore which have produced botanical and other lists of specimens.

Ardmore was originally designated an SSSI because of the geology and recently Strathclyde RIGS have produced an excellent free leaflet which describes the geology of the Point.

One of the attractions of carrying out surveys at Ardmore is the enjoyment of being in a very attractive location. The end aim would be to produce a publication to replace that of 1970. Anyone interested in helping should contact Ian.

EXCURSIONS 2006

Joyce Alexander

The summer excursion programme is included with the Newsletter but the booking forms for coach excursions will appear with the next Newsletter.

I hope members will approve the programme and enjoy participating in the various excursions. If you intend to join the excursion to the Brock Burn on 20th May, Jeanne would like you to bring/wear your Wellingtons.

Now for a little information on the coach excursions.

Among other things at the Dick Institute we will be able to handle items such as fossils and see minerals and rocks from all over Scotland.

Scotia Seeds were given seeds from North Uist that had been collected last year by a few of our members and the Society has been invited to visit this establishment.

The SWT reserve at Auchalton is rich in wildflowers, including orchids, and there is also an area of ancient woodland along with butterflies, birds and mosses.

I am told by member, Jimmy Connelly, who has led us on several interesting excursions, that plant recording at Coalton of Balgonie is on an old Bleachfield site. The area has been earmarked by the local community who hope to enhance and conserve the site for wildlife and for the community. There have been years of non-intervention on this site and plants, and also birds, have never been recorded.

GALLOWAY GARDEN FESTIVAL, 21st May 2006

June Mackay

The NCCPG will be running a minibus or coach to Lochinch Castle and to the 3rd Festival, which appears to be going from strength to strength. This year sees the start of a strong 18-month French connection between Brittany and Dumfries & Galloway.

"..... The project will include scientific/botanical exchanges between the Regions' gardeners, ethnobotanists and other scientists...."

If you are interested please contact me.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Mary Child

The AGM of the GNHS will be held on Tuesday 21st February at 7.15pm
A copy of the year's accounts is enclosed with this Newsletter.

Please can any members who have nominations for council members for 2006-7 contact the secretary, Mary Child.

The AGM will be followed by a talk from Roger Downie on "Why is the paradoxical frog paradoxical?"

Tuesday 28th February at 7.15pm Dr Bob Johnstone, a photographer and naturalist, from Alaska will be giving a talk about Alaska.

Tuesday 14th March the tutorial at 6.30pm is from Mike Rutherford on Woodlice and at 7.15pm it is the Members photographic night. Any members wishing to show slides should contact the photographic convener beforehand.

DARNLEY – WAULKMILL 'COUNTRY PARK'

Richard Weddle

The 2006 Excursion programme includes a number of visits to Darnley-Waulkmill to look at the invertebrates, geology and fungi of the area.

GNHS has visited the area a number of times before. It is a very varied area that has in the past seen various mining and other extraction operations, and a variety of industrial enterprises. Much of the area is now semi-natural woodland, with the Brock and Aurs burns flowing through; there are also some wetlands including a recently-created pond, and adjacent farmland; to the south is a group of reservoirs much used by migrating birds.

The flora of the area has been well described through *The Changing Flora of Glasgow*, and subsequent surveys by Keith Watson among others. Much of the area has been designated as a 'Site of Interest for Nature Conservation' (SINC); Waulkmill Glen, in the S of the area is a natural gorge which is a geological SSSI.

There is currently a plan, led by Carts Greenspace, in conjunction with Glasgow and E Renfrewshire Councils, to work towards designating the area as a Country Park, like Pollok and Mugdock. So the GNHS excursions are intended to support this project, both by promoting interest in the area, and by recording species which are important, but which perhaps tend to be overlooked – the invertebrates, both terrestrial and aquatic, and the fungi (which are relatively under-recorded within Glasgow, as compared with surrounding areas such as Mugdock).

I hope these excursions will be well supported by members and friends. It is an interesting area, it is not far to go (for most members), and I'm sure everyone who goes along will find it enjoyable - and learn something they didn't know before.

NATURAL HISTORY COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Dominic McCafferty

The Department of Adult & Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow offers a range of science courses for part time study. Courses are taught during the daytime, evening and at weekends. The following courses are available this session:

- Identification of Wild Plants
- Marine Mammal & Turtle Biology
- Geology in the Field
- Moons, rings and icy bodies (Astronomy)

The DACE programme also offers a wide range of courses including languages, art, history, music, literature and social sciences.

For further information or to request a brochure please contact DACE on 0141 330 1835, email dace-query@educ.gla.ac.uk or visit www.gla.ac.uk/adulteducation

CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND ROYAL ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Dr Adrian T. Sumner

The Conchological Society and Royal Entomological Society are holding a joint meeting at Perth on March 18th (no details of time and location) on Invertebrates of temporary waters, and we should be happy for GNHS members (and anyone else interested) to attend. It might help if anyone who wanted to come contacted me in advance (so that we can provide enough tea!), but not essential.

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NATIONAL SQUIRREL SURVEY

Richard Weddle

I mentioned in a recent Newsletter that we in the Glasgow Biological Records Centre had not been receiving many squirrel records in recent years, and I'm very pleased that we did subsequently receive a significant number. I even contributed some myself!

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has been monitoring the Scottish populations of Red and Grey Squirrels for a number of years. The questions they want to be able answer are: is the population of Reds declining, and are Greys increasing in numbers and range? Argyll is highlighted as one area where information is particularly scarce.

They have recently produced some leaflets to encourage us all to send in records. I'll bring along copies of these to the next few meetings. It would probably be easiest if West of Scotland records came to me in the first instance, as I already collate and send annual updates to SWT. The information required is as usual: what it was you saw, when, and where – a place-name together with either grid reference or address / post code would be ideal – and any other relevant details such as whether it was alive, or whether, for example, it had been killed on a road.

If you would like to be involved in organised survey groups rather than just sending in casual sightings, there are nearby groups:

- Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group: enquiries@ayrshirered squirrels.org.uk
- Central Scotland Red Squirrel Group: waddellc@stirling.gov.uk

If you'd like to help set up an Argyll group, or would like further information, please contact Mel Tonkin at SWT: mtonkin@swt.org.uk

If you're not part of such a group, it would be easiest if records of individual sightings were sent to me in the first instance - at biological.records@cls.glasgow.gov.uk

PELAGIC CRUISES

John Simpson

John has organised five pelagic cruises on the Clyde for 2006. The provisional dates and arrangements are as follows. They are all Saturdays – 29th April, 27th May, 22nd July, 19th August and 16th September. The first two will explore the waters of the inner Firth of Clyde, and the last three will go to Lochranza. For more details and to book places please contact John.