



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2009

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
22 March 2009

GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:
<http://www.gnhs.org.uk/>

Forthcoming Meetings and AGM

Mary Child

Tuesday 10th February

6.30pm **Tutorial** from Dominic McCafferty: How to write an article for the journal

7.30pm **Talk** from Peter Macpherson: Thirty years as a plant recorder for Lanarkshire.

Saturday 14th February

Darwin Study Day - Darwin and Evolution Today - on Saturday February 14th - commemorates the 150th anniversary of the publication of "On The Origin Of Species", and the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth. Speakers from the University of Glasgow will outline how Darwin's ideas on evolution are being explored today. The meeting is being held jointly with DACE and the Glasgow Science Festival. Please note that the meeting will be in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street. Details and booking (free) via <http://www.gla.ac.uk/dace/latestnews.htm>

Tuesday 24th February

7pm **AGM** followed by a talk from Stewart White: Conservation and community in Ecuador

Please can any members who have nominations for office bearers and councillors for the 2009 Council forward them to the secretary, Mary Child, 32 Springfield Park Road, Glasgow G73 3RQ.

Tuesday 10th March

6.30pm **Tutorial** from Mike Rutherford: Spiders

7.30pm **Members' Photographic Night**. Contact David Palmar (email address above) if you can give a talk – volunteers requested please – otherwise you may get a talk from David!

Tuesday 14th April

7.30pm Talk from Mike Hansell: Bird nests in museum collections: why?

On December 8th about 80 of us congregated in the Graham Kerr Building for the Conference "Machair Conservation: Successes and Challenges". The largest groups were – naturally – from GNHS and RSPB, but there was also a good representation from Scottish Agricultural College (SAC), Scottish Crop Research Institute (SCRI), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), from the Universities of Glasgow, Stirling, and Aberdeen, together with representatives from a number of wildlife and conservation agencies (with the notable exception of the Scottish Wildlife Trust).

Machair is the stunningly beautiful flower-rich grassland unique to the remote coastland of Western Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is one of the rarest habitats in Europe; the full global extent is believed to be around 40,000 ha, with 30,000 ha in Scotland and 10,000 ha in Ireland. It supports a spectacular diversity of rare or endangered species of plants and wildlife, making it of international importance. It is highly complex in its origins, development, ecology, variation and management, all of which makes it very vulnerable to damage and deterioration from changes in land use or management.

The conference was the culmination of a three year project jointly implemented by GNHS and RSPB with the 'headline' aim of conserving the seemingly ever-dwindling numbers of Great Yellow Bumblebee (GYB) (*B. distinguendus*), though birds, particularly Corncrake, were also of concern. And in this context, we adopted the rather wider definition of 'machair' to include most of the western coastal plain areas of the Hebrides.

In the morning we heard speakers describe the machair (a virtuoso performance by John Love), and some of the notable plants, birds, and invertebrates to be found there. The RSPB strategy for managing the habitats and wildlife, focussing on the aims and achievements of the three year project was outlined by Dave Beaumont, and Colin McPhail gave us some idea of the life of the crofters – on whom, of course, the continued survival of the machair habitat largely depends.

The sandwich lunch featured Hebridean salmon and beef; and an opportunity to view the splendid array of posters. It was particularly interesting to see the very interesting research being carried out on the traditional Hebridean crop varieties and agricultural practices such as the use of kelp as a fertiliser, as well as the variety of projects related to the conservation of the GYB.

The afternoon was devoted largely to research on the GYB, and also the Northern Colletes, another threatened species. The session began with a talk by Dave Goulson on the reasons for the decline in bumblebee numbers (changes in agricultural practices have played a large part); we then heard talks about the genetic diversity and sizes of the various populations of GYB; restoration of wildflower-rich habitats and their influence on GYB and Corncrake numbers (the interests of two species are not necessarily the same); and recent studies on the Northern Colletes mining-bee on Tiree.

After the research reports, we had a brief talk about a new educational 'outreach' pack produced by RSPB, and the day finished with Stewart Angus talking about

how SNH monitors the 'health' of the machair and the issues to be faced – including possible climate change.

The conference appears to have been very well received; there has been a lot of very positive feedback, and only a few murmurs of disappointment that the advertised talk on invasive non-native species was replaced at the last minute by something of rather less general interest – though the content of the original presentation WILL appear in the proceedings.

The proceedings of the conference, including the work reported on the posters, will be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Glasgow Naturalist* and will also be made available on the website www.gnhs.org.uk/machair.html. In the meantime, this link shows the abstracts of the various presentations and posters.

The three year project was partly funded by a grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Trust; we are also grateful to Scottish Natural Heritage for a grant towards the cost of publishing the proceedings of this conference; and the Blodwen Lloyd Binns trust also awarded grants towards specific aspects of the project.

Christmas Dinner

The Xmas Dinner was well attended and everyone enjoyed another year in the Museum. Sadly we are now being charged for using the Museum and the little lecture theatre and we will need to find an alternative for next year. Grooms earned our praise with a lovely three course meal and our guest speaker was Ross MacLeod who gave a great talk on the elusive Curassows of Peru and Bolivia. It was particularly good that several new members came and enjoyed the evening.

Glaswegian Newspaper

There is now going to be a regular feature on wildlife in the *Glaswegian* newspaper. The first article seems to have provoked a bit of interest from the public, so the paper is now launching a campaign to get people to upload their own Glasgow wildlife pictures to their website. It may be of some interest to GNHS members, hence the passing on of the information. People wouldn't be making money out of it, but they would have an opportunity to show off their photos.

They can be uploaded at the Glaswegian site here:

<http://www.theglaswegian.co.uk/contact/send-your-pictures/citywildlife/>

From the Biological Records Centre point of view, we'd like people to give us dates and locations too, preferably to biological.records@csglasgow.org

Random Records

- A great tit in full song beside one of the Lochmaben lochs in Dumfriesshire on Sunday 4th January.
- A Greenland White-Fronted Goose with a neck collar amongst the usual Whitefront flock at Loch Lomond. Further information on this should be found in the next edition of *Scottish Bird News*, published by the SOC.

The Newsletter Editor is desperate for copy. I offer the following hastily composed thoughts, none of which will be new to you!!

Control of trees and shrubs

Two quick examples to get my random thoughts going:

- A street tree demolished by a frightened council department in the face of demands from owners of a dwelling three houses away, that its roots have caused a crack in their lounge wall.
- Demands that a single statuesque giant hogweed be removed from an Eaglesham garden, whilst along our river banks they still grow unchecked, along with Japanese knotweed.

Japanese Knotweed also grows unchecked in some of our local parks, whilst in Brodie Park at Paisley are seedlings of Ash, Beech, Birch, Elm, Horse Chestnut and Sycamore growing within shrubberies and also within rose beds. They are never dug out, just chopped off, so that each year they sprout with renewed strength. Some years ago I challenged the Parks Department on this, suggesting that the park would eventually turn into a forest. They thanked me – and then with a great show of strength merely chopped them all off once again.

Ignoring tree seedlings isn't limited to our parks. Widespread are trees growing at the base not only of garden walls, but also of actual council houses, where they quickly get into the drains and foundations. And many landscape garden teams who maintain the grounds of private house estates, also leave these tree seedlings amongst the shrubberies. I have found that these 'gardeners' are quite unable to recognise them even in full leaf.

I think that in 50 years time our urban landscape will be dramatically different, with mature forest trees hiding the crumbling houses that sit between them. But in a different scenario the same Parks employees, who clearly know nothing about gardening, apparently find it difficult to understand and obey the instruction to leave a small section of a park as a wildlife area. They just mow over the lot. (Bob Gray) The same cry came from a friend in Eaglesham who had worked hard to obtain permission to plant a small group of tree seedlings on the Orry to replace old trees. They too were mown and destroyed.

Overriding existing legislation on open spaces

Take allotments, and a prime example that Government can over-ride its own rules whenever it suits. The site in East London where a thriving forty year old allotment was bulldozed to make way for a footpath to be used merely for the actual duration of the 2012 Olympic Games. In vain did the owners of the allotments protest that the years of care put into the soil, together with plants such as a forty year old vine, could in no way be transferred to a new site just to carry on as before. To add insult to injury they were also told that they would probably need to move from this new site after seven years!

The television programme in which this monstrous act was publicised also told us that at the time of filming locals said the felling of trees and undergrowth around the site had already caused the wildlife to crowd on to the actual allotment site. Assuming the site was bulldozed on schedule last September it has left newts, toads, frogs, hedgehogs, butterflies, kingfishers and sparrowhawks homeless – all for a four-week use of their site.

In the same excellent programme it was, as I recall, an Independent councillor in Surrey who headed locals' protests against the destruction of one of the three remaining rings of oaks that exist in Britain. She interviewed on screen the planning official responsible who knew nothing of its rarity, regarding the trees as a rather untidy mess. He was entirely happy that an Asda supermarket was more important, despite it being pointed out by the huge body of protesters that there were already six other supermarkets in the area.

Climate change, flooding and brownfield sites

Most of us are delighted to hear of development on a brownfield site rather than the too-frequently allowed encroachment into the greenbelt. However, too few of us understand that large back gardens are classified as brownfield sites. These sites, frequently made larger by the demolition of the original house, tend to produce expensive houses and apartments which in no way aid the need for inexpensive first-time housing. Surely the rule that gardens count as brownfield sites MUST be changed and developers forced to build on true brownfield sites, even though they don't give such huge profits.

Along with the concreting over of gardens and runways for cars comes the loss of playing fields, and also building on flood plains. What crass idiots have we put into power, who still allow flood plain building. (I wonder what has happened to the Lycopodium that was growing somewhat uncharacteristically beside the Clyde at Braehead –some years ago of course).

Final thoughts

The great danger is that, in the face of our current wall to wall bombardment of financial news, even less publicity will be given to the iniquitous acts of our various representatives - representatives who in the past, despite the publicity their laughable schemes received, still contrived to carry on regardless of public opinion. It is all very depressing.

Editor's note – Another point which can be made is the over-zealous cutting back of roadside hedges, to the detriment of habitat for birds. This is quite unnecessary, and if councils are looking for cutbacks, there is one staring them in the face!

Poor Timorous Beastie

Morag Mackinnon

Having seen evidence of a mouse (or two) inhabiting the house, reluctantly I had been prevailed upon to set a very modern trap baited with a little bit of Mars Bar! (We were assured this was the preferred offering)

Night 1 - Conclusively there had been a mouse in the house. No more.

Days (and nights) passed and nothing happened, until we returned after being away a few nights. Just as we entered the house I heard a noise. Mouse no 2 is lying there –head caught in the trap.

Ten minutes or so later when I picked it up to remove it from the kitchen, it started struggling. I was horrified that it was suffering and hurried out to the garden where I opened the trap on to a pile of leaves. The wee field mouse shook itself, sat up, looked at me, and put a paw up and very deliberately rubbed its jaw and then it staggered off. I do hope it lived to warn others that Mars Bars are not good for you.

Summer Excursion Programme 2009

Anne Orchardson

This year's Excursion Programme is now being finalised, and will be circulated in March. At the time of going to press, the first outing of the season is scheduled to take place on Saturday 28th March. We will be visiting the home of Lucy Clough, at Kilmun, where we will see the red squirrels that visit her garden regularly. She will also give us a conducted tour of a local garden where we will see around 30 different maples, and, time permitting, we can visit the nearby botanic gardens. Details of the timing and travel for this will be circulated nearer the time.

If you have any ideas for excursions during the summer, please let me know as soon as possible, as dates are filling up!

General Correspondence to the General Secretary.

Next Newsletter - copy to David Palmar by 22nd March 2009 please.

Please send contributions by email, preferably as .rtf, .doc or .docx (Word 2007) format. If you have time, please italicise taxonomic names. Please use **Verdana** font and size **12 points**. If sending photos, please submit only a few, and make them small if you know how to do that. (Please ask for advice if you want to know how to make them under 100Kb each for emailing) and always as **separate jpg files**, definitely **not** as part of a Word document.