



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November 2008

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
10 January 2009

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

2008 Indoor Meetings

November

Tuesday 11th Tutorial: Wildlife Photography: David Palmar. 6.30pm
Lecture: Bat conservation in man-made environments: Kirsty Park. 7.30pm

Thursday 27th Lecture: Year of the frog: Jules Howard. 6.00pm
Jointly with University of Glasgow Zoological Society **Note time and day!**

December

Monday 8th

Machair Conservation: Successes and Challenges - Full day conference

The Great Yellow Bumble Bee project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Trust which we have been administering for the RSPB is now in its final year and the Conference on Machair - its Wildlife, Management and Conservation will be Monday the 8th December 2008. Speakers and delegates will be coming from the Highlands and the Islands. Delegates will be paying £30 (our members and RSPB members will only be asked to pay £15) and this includes a sandwich lunch on a Hebridean theme. For many of the delegates it will be a long and expensive journey which will necessarily involve staying over one or two nights. Several members have offered accommodation - many thanks for that - and we would appreciate other offers. Richard Weddle is the Conference Secretary so send him your booking soon. (booking form on last page)

Can you contact me after 1st November if you would be able to volunteer to help with teas/coffees and offering hospitality.

Tuesday 16th Christmas Dinner. Zoology Museum, 7.30pm

Speaker Ross MacLeod - "Conserving the world's most threatened bird family: Curassows in Peru and Bolivia"

Price £22 per person send cheque payable to GNHS. The Xmas Menu is not yet finalised but I will send it to you in acknowledgement of your booking - please state if you require vegetarian option. Book by 30th November.

2009 Indoor Meetings

January

Tuesday 13th Lecture: Plant collecting in the Himalayas: Mark Watson, 7.30pm

February

Tuesday 10th Tutorial: *The Glasgow Naturalist*: How to write an article for the journal. Dominic McCafferty, 6.30pm

Lecture: Thirty years as Plant Recorder for Lanarkshire: the pearls and perils. Peter Macpherson, 7.30pm

Saturday 14th Darwin study day: to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the publication of the Origin of Species. All day meeting; jointly with University of Glasgow Department of Adult and Continuing Education, and the Glasgow Science Festival.

Details and booking form on website (soon) and in Newsletter

Tuesday 24th AGM, 7.00pm, followed by lecture: Conservation and community in Ecuador - six years of the Payamino Project: Stewart White

BLB Grants

Morag Mackinnon

At the last meeting of the BLB Executive the following grants were awarded.

Kathy Wormald was awarded £250 towards funding "Year of the Frog – A Big Leap forward" This is being held at Edinburgh Zoo on 14th November – 6.30 – 9.00pm. Prof Roger Downie is one of the Speakers. Prof. Aubrey Manning is in the chair. The Citylink bus stops right at the zoo!

Space is limited so book early - £5 - e-mail info@froglife.org.

Clare Marsh was awarded £300 towards hosting a day of Celebration of the Bicentenary of Charles Darwin's birthday which will be held in the Glasgow Science Centre 12th February 2009.

Patrick Walsh asked for £1984 for CCTV cameras including receivers and recorders to use in a project studying the cognitive behaviour of Scottish blue tits in nest building. Since it was felt that these cameras could be used by our members for their own projects when Dr Walsh has completed his study, we awarded him the whole amount out of the TEK fund.

\$3000 has been transferred to the Oregon Historical Society who are assisting in copying the Scouler manuscript - this research is being funded since it was Blodwen Lloyd Binns' wish to publish Scouler's biography and her notes have formed the starting point for this project. The research is being done by Charles Nelson, and the Oregon document is an important source. Some of you may remember that Scouler was the first (Honorary) President of the Society in 1851.

Three members met at Craigmuir Farm, near Strathaven, and after tea and cake walked around the planted woodland and developing meadow. These two areas, including ponds of various sizes, have been mainly managed by a 'hands off' approach after initial tree-planting and hedgerow restoration about 16 years ago. During this time a former 1 acre cow pasture has become fairly dense woodland.

Dead wood has been managed mainly by not moving it at all. We found a water-filled rot-hole with two species of saproxylic hoverfly larvae (*Myathropa florea* and a *Xylota* sp.). The British rhinoceros beetle (*Sinodendron*) was evident from borings with larvae and adults revealed by crumbling the surface of an old stump from the original shelter belt.

The 4.7 acre meadow has had hay cut and removed each year and no fertiliser input. Three years ago both meadow brown and ringlet butterflies moved in, clearly finding the more diverse grass and flower flora suitable for their life cycles. Only one adult ringlet was seen, due to the lateness in the day and slightly overcast conditions.

Finally, a dip in the largest pond produced quantities of water fleas (*Daphnia* sp.) and phantom midge larvae (*Chaoborus* sp.), suspended in the water like miniature translucent sharks. Their main food is *Daphnia* so they were thriving in numbers also. We watched a chironomid midge emerge from its chrysalis at the water surface and fly off, no doubt to provide food for one of the swooping swallows. Then back inside for more tea and cake as the rain came on.

Gardener or Naturalist? – the age-old question

Junella McKay

Like many of my friends I have faced reality and downsized. No longer can I step out of the back door into the mish-mash of my beloved overgrown, overcrowded garden in Paisley. No longer will I hear the foxes barking on a winter night, nor rejoice in the call of the tawny owl in the huge sycamore tree which, let's be honest, was the bane of my life. I will miss the randy frogs calling through the night in the early spring; and I will definitely miss the comedic fights between squirrels and magpies in my willow tree to which I had a ringside seat.

With so much cover the bird life was varied and exciting; (and I am well aware that it was a deal more varied than my very limited range of song recognition allowed). I fear that the small flock of long-tailed tits gorging on the nut cage just outside my kitchen window will be just a memory. Likewise the excitement of the first winter siskins, as well as the antics of the house sparrows, starlings and robins attempting to crack the code of the nut cage. I recall a mouse quietly gorging away early one morning, not to mention the joy of the first willow warbler calling in spring and the blackbirds bathing in the pond. Oh, I could rhapsodise endlessly!

Because I had plant life on all the walls; nodding at the windows and growing almost into the house, I was plagued by an endless variety of creepy crawlies. Sorry Richard W., but this is one self-inflicted nightmare from which I am delighted to escape! It is one thing to have a shield bug on the picnic table, but quite another to have a creature large and ugly enough to grace the Amazon jungle in the kitchen sink, and nobody but me to remove it.

A History of the Native Woodlands of Scotland, 1500-1920

T.C. Smout et al.

Edinburgh University Press 2005

Hardback £60

This history of Scottish woodlands is written by authors highly respected in their field. The text explores the changing relationship between trees and people from the time of Scotland's first settlement, focusing on the period 1500 to 1920, the year of founding of the Forestry Commission. It presents an account that balances social, economic and environmental factors and reference is made to papers presented at the Society's conference in 2001 about alien species.

Birds of Prey

Collins

2008

Benny Gensbol

Hardback £30.00

This book is the 4th Edition of the original Danish title *Birds of Prey of Europe, North Africa and the Near East*, published in 2004. The translation into English is by Martin Walters. The Introduction covers a wide variety of aspects of raptor biology – their adaptations, food, hunting methods, migration, breeding, pollution threats, habitat change, shooting, persecution and captive breeding. All this is found before the rest of the book which is divided into a section dealing with the description of some 49 different species and another that deals with their identification. It is beautifully illustrated with colour plates and drawings and distribution maps for each species. The illustrations are by B. Bertel and the whole book is the result of collaboration between the author and specialists from 32 different European countries.

The Lost Land of the Dodo

A & C Black

2008

Anthony Cheke & Julian Hume

Hardback £45.00

This book covers the course of the relatively recent natural history of a group of islands in the Indian Ocean called the Mascarenes, which includes Mauritius. Animals evolved amazing forms in the absence of mammalian predators. Indiscriminate slaughter followed colonisation in the 16th Century and introduced species soon destroyed their eggs. The dodo, icon of extinction, was lost within 60 years and other endemic species within 150 years. The author is an authority on the history of these extinctions. The book is most readable and contains superb colour plates of contemporary illustrations, many of which have not been printed for hundreds of years. The artist, J. Hume, specialises in the recreation of extinct species in their natural habitat. In view of current concerns this is a timely work.

Dragonflies New Naturalist

Collins

2008

Philip Corbet & Stephen Brooks

Paperback £25 Hardback £45

Dragonflies are among the most ancient of living creatures. In this seminal new work, the authors examine the behaviour, ecology and distribution of dragonflies in Britain and Ireland, placing emphasis on the insects' habitats and on measures needed to conserve them. They have combined their knowledge and experience to explain the relevance of British dragonfly species in a worldwide natural history context. Illustrated with beautiful photography throughout, *New Naturalist Dragonflies* explores all aspects of the biological significance of dragonfly behaviour,

thus revealing the beauty and hidden complexity of these powerful, agile, flying predators.

Arctic Fox
A & C Black

2008

Garry Hamilton
Hardback £16.99

This beautifully presented, illustrated and finished book tells the evolutionary history of the arctic fox and discusses its ecological relationships with both the extreme environment where it lives and also other arctic animals. The author, a wildlife journalist, refers to up to date research work being carried out in the arctic in order to bring to life the extraordinary story of the arctic fox. An epilogue considers the future of this animal in a potentially changing climate. The book's stunning photographs were taken by Norbert Rosing, described as being "the best photographer of the arctic working today."

Wolf
A & C Black

2008

Rebecca L. Grambo
Paperback £14.99

Although this book chronicles the evolutionary history and relationships of the wolf with its nearest relatives the text is as much about this creature's relationship with humans and the myths and legends that have grown up around it, making it an animal at once revered and feared. Quotations from a range of poems and novels make the work interesting to a wide audience whilst the photographs by Daniel Cox, an international award winning natural history photographer, make the book visually most attractive.

Glasgow Bridge, 23rd July 2008

Peter Macpherson

A botanical field meeting was held on the evening of 23rd July with an attendance of 12. The rendezvous was a large lay-by off the A803, close to the Glasgow Bridge which crosses the Forth and Clyde Canal south-west of Kirkintilloch. For recording purposes, the area is in Lanarkshire (VC 77).

We recorded in tracks through arable fields to the south of the canal, on roadsides and along the canal. The area involved is part of NS6372 and NS6373.

A total of 118 different plant taxa was recorded. Grasses made up 17 of these, the most interesting being Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*). Four rushes, three ferns and two sedges were recorded. In the agricultural land there was the relative rarity the Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*). By the canal we noted Gipsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*), while in the water there was an abundance of Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*) and Narrow-leaved Water-plantain (*Alisma lanceolatum*). However that which aroused most interest was Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*). It is a striking plant, projecting as it does from the water. This was only the second 1 km square record for Lanarkshire. Richard Weddle added to the natural history recording by netting insects as we went along!

Mugdock Country Park, 6th September 2008

Adrian T. Sumner

The aim of this excursion was to look at the biodiversity of Mugdock Country Park, in particular its slugs and snails, and we started to find some nice ones in the piece of woodland just next to the south car park. One species that turned out to be

common here was the slug *Arion owenii*, not even recognised as a separate species until just over 30 years ago, but common in the west of Scotland. Coming from the east, where this species is rarely found, I'm always pleased to see this handsome smallish slug, with its reddish brown back, and yellow sole. Another interesting slug here was our first specimen of *Boettgerilla pallens*, a whitish subterranean species first recorded in Britain in 1972 in the Lake District, since when it has spread widely. There are not many records of it in the west of Scotland, however, and Mugdock appears to be a new site for it. The tree-climbing slug *Lehmannia marginata* was also here, and in the rest of the wood.

Moving on to Mugdock Loch, we found a solitary specimen of the small freshwater mussel *Sphaerium corneum*, but nothing else, not even the wandering snail *Radix balthica* (formerly *Lymnaea peregra*). Perhaps the water was too acid. However, by the shore the first of several specimens of the amphibious snail *Zonitoides nitidus* was spotted. This dark little snail likes really wet places, and turned out to be quite common all the way through Mugdock Wood down to the Allander Water. Again, this is a species that I rarely find in the east.

We stopped for lunch by Mugdock Castle, but hopes that the mortar of the restored building would attract the garden snail *Helix aspersa* were dashed; the restoration of the castle was so thorough that there weren't any cracks and crevices for it to hide in! However, there was a good population of the little *Lauria cylindracea*, a species typical of walls and rocks.

In the nearby rough grassland a couple of specimens of one of our tiniest snails, *Carychium tridentatum*, were found – a not uncommon species, but at less than 2 mm tall, easily overlooked. The moss on a tree trunk yielded a specimen of the small tree-climbing snail *Balea heydeni*; this species has only been recognised in Britain in the past couple of years, so all records of it are very welcome. Two other species found here were the snail *Oxychilus draparnaudi* and the slug and the slug *Tandonia sowerbyi*, both of which are rather sparsely distributed in Scotland and which appear to be new records for this area; both species tend to prefer waste ground and are associated with human activity.

Going down through the wood towards then Allander Water we found more specimens of *Zonitoides nitidus*, as well as several commoner species. When we came to the ruins of the Wood House, I expected that the crevices among the fallen stonework, and the lime from the mortar (essential for snails to make their shells) would attract plenty of snails, but surprisingly there were hardly any there.

The Allander Water duly produced several specimens of the freshwater limpet *Ancylus fluviatilis*, but was too fast-flowing to expect any other species. However, on the banks of the river we came across another nice specimen of *Boettgerilla pallens*, nicely rounding off a day full of interesting slugs and snails.

Visit to Glasgow Green, 26th June, 2008

Bob Gray

The sun shone brightly for our evening visit to historic Glasgow Green, Glasgow's oldest park, dating from 1450. A concert meant that the northwest centre of the park around Nelson's column and James Watt's stone was cut off but we proceeded from the Doulton fountain at the entrance to the People's Palace anti-clockwise round the perimeter.

Early on we encountered a grey poplar (*Populus canescens*), one of several to be found on the Green. This tree is a cross between white poplar (*P. alba*) and aspen (*P. tremula*) and possesses leaves similar to but larger than those of aspen. The northwest corner contains a few interesting poplars such as aspen itself, grey poplar, black poplar (*P. nigra* var. *betulifolia*) and the black Italian poplar (*P. 'Serotina'*). The differences between them were noted. Of greatest interest was the discovery of what looked like Picart's poplar (*P. canescens* 'Macrophylla'), having strikingly large aspen-like leaves. This is very rare and likely to be the only one in Glasgow. Other poplars found here include several hybrid blacks (*P. x canadensis*), a cross between the European black and forms of the North American Eastern cottonwood (*P. deltoides*). The large size of the poplars and willows found on the Green indicate their fair age and is probably a reflection of the low-lying nature of the habitat and its damp subsoil.

Glasgow Green was laid out in its present form between 1815 and 1826 by James Cleland, chief superintendent of public works. A major feature of the park's 55 acres is the existence of long, straight avenues consisting mainly of single species. The longest is probably that which consists of hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and runs northwestwards from the Low Green Gate on the park's east side. Others consist of Crimean lime (*Tilia x euchlora*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), and topiaried yews (*Taxus baccata*) northwest of Nelson's column.

Not all the avenues are monospecific, however. Towards the northeastern side, near the play park, are at least two avenues of mixed hardwoods, planted more or less in pairs – of whitebeam (both *Sorbus aria* and *S. intermedia*), purple sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus* f. *purpureum*), Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), English oak (*Quercus robur*), silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), ash, birch (*Betula* spp.) and others.

The lack of conifers is one of the characteristic features of Glasgow Green. In the wettest areas, by the riverside, can be found examples of Italian alder (*Alnus cirdata*), as well as the common alder (*A. glutinosa*) and sizeable white willows. Conifers that can be found include a pair of Deodar cedars (*Cedrus deodara*) near the famous drying green (where freemen of Glasgow possess the right to dry their washing) and an avenue of young western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) running northwestwards from the James Watt statue. (He conceived in the park his idea for the development of a steam engine that led to the Industrial Revolution.) Other trees of significance include a row of scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*) and a single, young specimen of a Caucasian wingnut (*Pterocarya fraxinifolia*). At the northwestern entrance to Glasgow Green is located the iconic McLennan Arch, fronted by five pairs of *Prunus* 'Kanzan' and a double crescent of Crimean lime, a fine sight in early spring when the cherry is in flower. The arch itself is arguably the most travelled piece of stonework in Glasgow, having been moved at least twice before reaching its present position facing the old High Court in 1992.

Finally it should be mentioned that, near the southern boundary, in the middle of a silver maple plantation is a plaque that reads: "Trees planted by the Lord Provost, Bailies & Councillors of Glasgow Corporation prior local government reorganisation in April 1975." The age of these trees is therefore clear.

So Glasgow Green is undoubtedly a park that will appeal to those with an interest in observing at close quarters many different species of hardwoods arranged both formally and informally.

Plean Country Park, 5th July 2008

Edna Stewart

Eight members met at the car park of the country park, where unfortunately there is no coffee shop. However we shouldered our rucksacks and set off. We soon came to a small pond with a surprising number of interesting plants. The surface was covered with the leaves of the Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltata*). Only one flower, still in bud was seen. There was a large stand of Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*), some Reed-mace (*Typha latifolia*) and Bottle segde (*Carex rostrata*). Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Water Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*) and both Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and Greater Spearwort (*R. Lingua*) were also found. We discovered later that at least some of these plants had been planted.

The day was cold and windy, so there were no damsel flies on the pond. But while the botanists were examining the plants of the pond, Richard had been looking under Sycamore leaves, and found Orange Ladybirds – including a mating pair. We then headed for the Wildflower Meadow, to view and possibly count the Greater Butterfly Orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*) which are a feature of this Country Park. We gave up after reaching 800, with about 1/3 of the meadow still to cover.

After a picnic at a bench beside the ruins of Plean House, we set off again, passing the lade of the Water Mill en route for the South Bing. This has been colonised by birch with a carpet of Hawkweed (*Hieracium vulgatum*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). As we were admiring some Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*), Pam spotted a group of Common Wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*). This was found on both sides of the path, and flowering spikes were plentiful.

The rain had been threatening for a while but we got back to the cars before the deluge arrived!

LOST in Söll One pair of cream Ecco walking shoes. Size 37. Looking for Cinderella to claim them??? (Sadly too small for me, but if they are yours contact Morag)

Next Newsletter - copy to David Palmar by 10th January 2009 please.
Contributor Guidelines – please stick to these if possible to make the Editor's life easier!
Contributions should be sent preferably as .rtf or .doc (Word 2003) format, but **not** .docx (Word 2007 format). If you have time, please italicise taxonomic names. Please use **Verdana** font and size **12 points**, otherwise I will have to undo all your text formatting before I can use your contribution. 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.

Preliminary Note of Wildlife seen in Erskine

Norman Grist

Main wildlife seem here are the flock of over 100 Jackdaws – their clamorous evening patrol of their territory is impressive also a few small birds, blackbirds etc. - none really studied until we complete resettlement. Rabbits and an occasional fox are regulars and 8 deer (? spp)

Darwin200

Dominic McCafferty

We will be holding an event on 14 February 2009 to mark the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of 'Origin of Species'. In preparation for this event I would like to hear from anyone who may know of any local connections between Glasgow, Scotland and Charles Darwin. This could be a relevant article, species held in collections or other biographical links. It would be very interesting to compile a display to accompany our study day next year. Details of the Darwin200 event will be publicised in due course.

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Machair Conference Booking Form

Conference: Machair Conservation - Successes & Challenges
Monday 8th December 2008

Registration (GNHS members): £15 per member

Please fill form in capitals

Name (s) _____

Address _____

e-mail _____

Tel _____

Send application (with cheque payable to GNHS) to:
GNHS, c/o Zoology Museum,
Graham Kerr Building,
University of Glasgow,
G12 8QQ