



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2004

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
8 October 2004

GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:

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

EVENTS AND EXCURSIONS LIST – AUTUMN 2004

Contact Organiser to check dates, transport, and to confirm interest. Buses leave Kelvin Way near the car park entrance to Kelvingrove Museum and Art Galleries.

September

Sun. 12th. Inversnaid. Bryophytes. 11.00am–1.00pm. Meet car park at Inversnaid Hotel. Keith Watson.

October

Sat. 2nd. Inversnaid. Fungus Foray. Bus 9.00am. Please use booking form. Robin Jones.

Sat. 16th. Bothwell Woods. Fungus Foray. Meet Uddingston railway station 10.00am. Robin Jones.

November

Sat 13th (note change of date). Red Kite viewing. Meet car park at Lerrocks Farm, Argaty, Doune, Perthshire 1.30pm. (Time may have to be changed so please phone or see Newsletter for details). Please use the booking form as numbers are limited to 25.

For details of individual excursions please contact excursion leader at least 3 days beforehand. Leader will co-ordinate those offering and those requiring transport.

In the case of mini-bus excursions please use the booking forms in the relevant Newsletters. It is advisable to book early.

Leader may cancel excursion if there is insufficient interest.

Please help leader to compile lists for the Excursion Records which should be sent to the Bio-recorder.

MEETINGS PROGRAMME –AUTUMN 2004

September 21st	Exhibition meeting: wine and cheese Tutorial "Focus on Fungi" led by Robin Jones
October 19th (changed date)	Noranne Ellis: Climate change and Scotland's natural heritage
October 27th	Tutorial: Glasgow University Campus Biodiversity survey report, led by Keith Watson, Geoff Hancock and Bob Gray
November 9th	Tutorial: Euan Donaldson on the history of Glasgow Botanic Gardens Malcolm Kennedy on "The Natural History of Kamchatka"
November 17th (Wednesday)	BLB Lecture 5pm, WILT Tracey Chapman "The complex mating games of insects" (confirmed)
November 27th (Saturday)	Conference: The Natural History of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs
December 14th	Dinner: speaker – Aidan McCormick on the "Rare birds of Bolivia"

The Glasgow Natural History Society is holding a one-day conference

"THE NATURAL HISTORY OF LOCH LOMOND AND THE TROSSACHS"

On **Saturday 27th November 2004** at 10am

In The Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow G12 8QQ

This is a first intimation of the date for your diaries. Further details,
programme and cost will be available later on our web-site

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

We would be very grateful if you could pass this information on to your
members, staff, colleagues and friends.

Our Society incorporates the Microscopical Society of Glasgow and possesses seven microscopes available for members to borrow. These comprise:

- Two Swift stereos, up to x60 magnification,
- Four Beck monoculars, up to x450,
- One Nikon binocular, capable of oil immersion, viewing up to x1000.

There is therefore a wide range of observing possibilities from fairly gross objects such as external views of rock samples, plants or insects down to small spores, yeasts or bacteria.

Geoff Hancock, Curator of Entomology at the Hunterian Museum (Zoology) has kindly agreed to allow them to be stored in his room located next to the Museum in the Graham Kerr building. They may be borrowed by contacting Geoff by anyone in the Society who has a short-term use for them and provided that they are available as required for tutorials.

BOOKS RECEIVED IN EXCHANGE FOR REVIEWS IN *THE GLASGOW NATURALIST*

Ruth Dobson

**1. *Seashore – Collins Wild Guide* Ken Preston-Mafham
Harper Collins 2004 **£8.99****

This is an introductory guide to some of the most common animals and plants that you can find on the coasts of Britain and Northern Europe. 240 species are described, each being illustrated in colour, with information about distribution, habitat and reproduction. It provides an ideal way to learn and understand more about seashore life.

**2. *Collins Tree Guide* Owen Johnston and David More
Harper Collins 2004 **£25****

This is described as the most complete fully-illustrated field guide to the trees of Britain and Northern Europe, with over 1500 trees described. The detailed text is clearly designed for quick and accurate identification with each species described and illustrated on the same page, with superb colour illustrations.

**3. *Seashore* Collins New Naturalist no 94.
Harper Collins 2004 hardback **£40****

This volume brings the natural history of the seashore right up-to-date, being a comprehensive authoritative account from the earliest times to the present day. The long British coastline with large tidal ranges offers a wide range of coastal habitats, which are home to an abundance of animal and plant life. This book explores the biology, ecology and dynamic interactions of sea-shore communities.

- 4. *Irish Birds*** **David Cabot**
Harper Collins **Revised edition 2004** **£14.99**
This book describes 167 of the most frequently occurring birds in Ireland, chosen to include those that the non-specialist birdwatcher is most likely to see. The birds are grouped according to habitat, with background information about each habitat. The last section details 74 of the best sites for birdwatching with directions for visiting.
- 5. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland by Habitat***
Mark Golly
New Holland in association with the Wildlife Trusts **£14.99**
This essential companion for birdwatchers of all levels of expertise is arranged by habitat, these including coastal, woodland, wetland, mountains and moorlands, farmlands and grassland, urban and heathland. It is packed with identification tips, details of habitat and calls for over 280 regularly seen species, as well as less common migrants. There are over 1000 colour illustrations.
- 6. *The BTO/CJ Garden Birdwatch Book*** **Mike Toms**
British Trust for Ornithology 2003 **£9.99**
The book provides a fascinating insight into the comings and goings of birds in our gardens, and reveals the results of this all-year survey of garden birds. It gives information on how birds use gardens, in different regions, seasons and weather, and what to plant to improve a garden for birds. Its main object is to publicise the Garden Birdwatch scheme organised by the BTO. The book is available from the BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, by sending a cheque for £10.99, or join GBW for £12 and get the book free! More information from Mike Toms on 01842 750050.
- 7. *An Illustrated Guide to British Upland Vegetation***
AM Averis, ABG Averis, HJB Birks, D Horsfield, DBA Thompson and MJM Yeo
Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2004 **£25**
This is the first comprehensive single book on plant communities in the British uplands. It provides concise descriptions of all currently recognised British upland vegetation types. It brings together all the upland communities described in the National Vegetation Classification, with some previously undescribed assemblages of plant species. A key enables the reader to classify vegetation in the field. There are detailed sections on the ecology and conservation of each community, and up-to-date distribution maps.
- 8. *Botanical Latin*** **William T Stearn**
David and Charles **First pocketbook edition 2004** **£19.99**
First published in 1966, this is widely recognised as a classic of botanical literature and is the definitive work of reference on this important subject. This internationally renowned guide summarises the grammar and syntax of botanical Latin, and covers the origins of Latin and Latinised geographical names, symbols and abbreviations, diagnoses and descriptions, the formation of names and epithets and more.

REPORTS BY MEMBERS

Otter

Richard Griffiths

The best way from Broomhill to Glasgow City Centre has to be a walk via the canal. This winds from Anniesland, divides at Maryhill and ends at Dobbies Loan. From there it is a short walk into town. There is always something different beside the canal and March is a fine time of year. It was 2002, and I was actually bound for the cinema and was cursing as I knew the light would have failed before I had finished the trip. From Anniesland I went under the new bridge at Cleveden where I spotted a swirl in the water ahead.

It brought to mind a dabchick and because I always find those captivating, the binoculars came out. However it wasn't a grebe because the water was rolling around like a small whirlpool. There were splashes to the side of the rolling and these were actually frogs, as they fled for their lives.

The author of the swirl swooshed on to the bank to eat its catch. It was a mustelid and a large one at that. This is where the fun began for me. Was it a mink or an otter? Being in the centre of Glasgow it was much more likely to be a mink, but still this was the point where the canal went over the Kelvin, so there was river access. As it did not spot me I could examine it carefully.

It was very dark brown/black above and its under sides were a lighter shade of brown. Its head was broad, virtually flat with two tiny ears. Due to its size, shape and lack of any white under the chin it was certainly an otter. After it had finished its meal it slid back into the water and pursued more frogs as they were busy trying to breed. It slid under the water displaying a very broad and flattened tail. Whilst it did this I moved forward till I was about 30 yards away. Once more it appeared on the far side in the flattened reed bed and ate the second meal. It could smell me, as its nose tasted the air but it did not spot me or take fright. Again it returned and virtually seemed to be playing as it chomped frogs. Their capture seemed easy as it slid onto the reeds again to eat.

This time it returned to the water and disappeared. The reason was the appearance of a new mammal, a fox. Indeed, the fox did not seem a whole lot smaller than the mustelid, which confirmed it was an otter. The fox was a fine specimen. It had beautiful fur that was a dark tinted red. It waded past where the otter had been and lifted its leg on a clump of reeds just to show who was boss. After it left, the otter resurfaced towards the aqueduct which crosses the Kelvin. Unfortunately a couple of lads were moving noisily down the far side of the canal so it left the water and disappeared. I later found it could easily slide down from there into the Kelvin. I only just made it to the cinema, but boy what a trip!

Flying Ants

Norman Grist

Reports of invasion of Glasgow by hordes of flying ants in late July this year passed me by, but reminded me of an experience in 1976 in Arran. Restoring the fence and overgrown hedge defences against sheep and deer had removed grazing pressure so that our garden next year became a lush jungle of tall grasses, brambles, gorse, thistles, nettles, wild flowers etc. Attack to clear this by machete, scythe, shears and secateurs revealed a rich crop of ticks - formerly not apparent in the close-cropped grass (*Arran Naturalist* 1990; 123: 31).

One hot, late summer afternoon later that year I was stripped to the waist tending a dwindling bonfire of cuttings, spoil, old wood and other "junk" from around the cottage. A tall column of whitish smoke rose in the still air. Suddenly my torso became tickled by increasing numbers of insects landing on it. Brushed off, they continued to arrive - flying ants. The horde was flying from high down the smoke column and landing on myself - perhaps as the first pale target to which the white smoke guided them. The episode lasted only a few minutes and the insects shed their wings and dispersed within the scrub. I had no bites or damage whatever, for these ants had no reason for aggression towards me.

Another example of shedding wings no longer required was a single deer-fly (*Lipoptena cervi*) that dropped on one of us from a tree in the garden another year. Discarded as a "damaged" specimen, it was later that I realised that the cast wings were no longer required once the fly had landed on its intended victim (normally deer) for a blood feed.

Amorous Advances at Lochwinnoch

Gordon Jamieson

On 26th March at Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve, I noticed a female Teal behaving oddly. It was holding its head and neck under the water for several seconds, then thrashing around wildly as if trapped by something. When it raised its head from the water, I saw what appeared to be two long ears sticking out of its head. When viewed through the telescope, these turned out to be the hind legs of a large frog. At first I thought that the Teal was trying to swallow the frog, but then I realised that the frogs' front legs were clasping the Teal's neck, and the frog was therefore hanging upside-down. For several minutes, the Teal struggled to rid itself of the frog and finally succeeded. It seemed unharmed apart from some ruffled feathers. Presumably the frog (a male?) had mistaken the Teal's head and neck for a female and had made amorous advances. The Teal was clearly unwilling!

From the Editors of *The Glasgow Naturalist*

Azra and Peter Meadows

Much to our exasperation, we have recently been asked to move office and laboratory space. This has taken the whole of July, and has used up all the time we had put aside to see the current issue through the press. We therefore now expect the current issue to be out in late autumn. We are very sorry for this delay, which has been not of our making.

The bus left from Kelvin Way sharp at 9.00 hrs, with 15 members on board which left one spare seat. The party arrived at about 10.30 hrs at Yellow Craig Nature Reserve where we were met by the Ranger, Bobby Anderson, who led us up Spyglass Hill and pointed out the house where R L Stevenson had lived and from where he had gleaned ideas for Treasure Island. Bobby explained that the Hill was the volcanic plug within the Yellow Craig vent, consisting of hard black microporphyritic basalt. Bobby explained that the volcanic activity took place in the Carboniferous Period approximately 340 Ma. From the viewpoint he pointed out various geological features e.g. roche moutonnee, raised beach and various volcanic plugs forming the offshore islands.

We crossed the Dune Pasture, where we were delighted with a rich carpet of wild flowers including Sea Rocket *Cakile maritime*, Eyebright *Euphrasia nembrosa*, Restharrow *Ononis repens*, Thyme *Thymus drucei* and many orchids including the Common Twaebblade *Listera ovata*. One of the best sightings was the attractive Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*. Fungi were not prolific but we did see the Fairy Ring Champignon or Scottish Bonnets *Marasmius oreades*.

Bobby was very knowledgeable and raised many interesting points such as dealing with the common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* which causes liver damage in livestock due to the alkaloid poison in the plant. While one Government Department asks for it to be eradicated, another advocates biodiversity. On the ragwort we found the attractive black and yellow cinnabar moth caterpillar *Tyria jacobaeae*, which can feed on the ragwort and is not affected by the poisonous alkaloids, although it is poisonous to anything that eats the caterpillar.

The ranger was most knowledgeable in the ornithological field and was soon pointing out the diverse numbers of seabirds along the shoreline including sanderling.

The day had started damp and wet but as it progressed into a warm and sunny day, all too soon we had to board the bus, which took us to the nearby village of Dirleton, where we had lunch. Because there were more than 10 of us we were able to buy discount tickets to the Castle. The gardens are famous for the flowers and we enjoyed them in the warm sunshine. Probably the highlight of the visit was a talk in the vaults by a knight in shining armour. He demonstrated various weapons in an instructive, informative and amusing manner. He also explained the derivation of such terms as 'the upper crust', 'sideburns' and the 'two fingered salute'.

At 16.00 hrs we boarded the bus and arrived back in Glasgow at 17.30 hrs.

RSPB Lochwinnoch Second-hand Natural History Book Sale

This year's eagerly awaited RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve's Second-hand Natural History Book Sale will be from Saturday 18th to Sunday 26th September 2004 (10-5pm).

There are several ways you can get involved:

- ❑ Donate books - all proceeds going to RSPB
- ❑ Let us have some books for us to sell on your behalf. We will keep a mere 10% for commission. If you have a rare book and you want to get the best price for it, we can put it into the auction. Book prices for non-auction books can be fixed by yourself or by a local expert (our preferred option).
- ❑ Ask for an auction list
- ❑ Come to the reserve and buy books

There will be no selling prior to the event but afterwards, a list of books remaining will be produced and items sold off from this. We can send you this list on request

Anything natural history (books/magazines/journals/pamphlets/even maps, etc.) qualify for the sale.

Quite a few good books have already come in including rare/scarce/out of print, but we are always looking for more. Books need to be with us ASAP.

You can hand them in to either:

RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve, Largs Road, Lochwinnoch,
Renfrewshire, PA12 4JF (any day from 9am-5pm) Contact Joan Shaw
or

RSPB South & West Scotland Regional Office, 10 Park Quadrant, Glasgow, G3
6BS (Mon-Fri from 9am-5pm) Contact Clare Fergusson