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Editorial

It takes all sorts

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This issue of *The Glasgow Naturalist* contains nine normal articles (full papers and short notes). Since the previous issue contained 14 (excluding Scottish Herpetological Conference contributions), it appears that there is a continuation of the general decline in the submission rate over recent years that was discussed in the 2024 editorial. This is the lowest number of non-conference articles in an issue since the format of the journal was modernised in 1996, the zenith being in 2001 when Volume 23, Part 6 featured 25 full papers and seven short notes. Hopefully, this is not a long-term trend: a watching brief is required. Furthermore, it goes without saying that quality matters more than quantity. Despite being small in number, the articles pertain to several biomes – freshwater, marine and urban-terrestrial – and a reasonable range of taxa representing the three major Kingdoms of Life – Animalia, Plantae and Fungi – and including the human subjects of two biographical contributions.

The two papers with a biographical theme or sub-theme are a reminder that there are two main categories of naturalists: full-time professionals whose careers are devoted to one or more aspects of natural history, and part-time amateurs with full-time careers in an area of endeavour unrelated, or not closely related, to their specialist natural history interests. William Baird (1803-1872), the subject of Geoff Moore's paper (Moore, 2025), was, after leaving his career as a surgeon in 1841, an example of the former, working in the zoology department of the British Museum for 30 years and producing during that period over 90 publications on a wide range of natural history topics. On the other hand, one of the protagonists in Geoff Hancock's paper (Hancock, 2025) is Peter McDougall (1770-1814), who was a Glasgow medical doctor, amateur naturalist and discoverer of the roseate tern *Sterna dougallii*.

It is fascinating to note how the advancement of natural history knowledge has depended on both professional and amateur specialists during the nearly 260 years since the establishment in 1767 of the first Chair in Natural History in the British Isles at the University of Edinburgh, which could be viewed as the start of the "professionalisation" of the discipline. Unfortunately, the first appointee to this position – Robert Ramsay (1735-1778) – was a physician who "never lectured, treating his position as a complete sinecure" (Shapin, 1974).

Nineteenth century natural history was of course dominated by a certain professional of independent means – Charles R. Darwin (1809-1892), but there were by then many salaried professionals. Charles Wyville Thomson, for example, was Professor of Natural History in Queen's College, Cork and later in the University of Edinburgh, and is best known as the Chief Scientist on the Challenger Expedition (1872-1876), though he published many papers on other aspects of natural history (Balfour, 1883). The host of 19th century amateurs included David Robertson (1806-1896), "the Cumbrae naturalist" and the Reverend David Landsborough, the elder (1779-1854), "the Scottish Gilbert White", both of whom made significant contributions to marine natural history, geology and other areas. Both also eventually switched to professional status (as defined above), Robertson voluntarily after the sale of his Glasgow retail business and Landsborough involuntarily after losing his Stevenston church during the Great Disruption of 1843 (Anonymous, 1897; Moore, 2007).

In the 20th century, British lichenology underwent two episodes of revival aided by two remarkable women of Scots descent, one a professional and the other an amateur. Annie Lorrain Smith (1854-1937) was a mycologist who worked for most of her life in the botany department of the British Museum and produced a textbook (Smith, 1921a), the second edition of a two-volume monograph of British Lichens (Smith, 1918, 1926), and a handbook (Smith, 1921b) whose keys to all British lichens were, like the monograph, unsuperseded for 70 years (Creese, 2004; Maroske & May, 2018). Ursula K. Duncan (1910-1985) had a premier role in the post-World War 2 renaissance of British lichenology. Whilst her day-job was the management of the family estate near Arbroath, she provided over 25% of the Scottish lichen records in the 1953 *Census Catalogue* (Watson, 1953), was a founder member of the British Lichen Society in 1958, and wrote *Introduction to British Lichens* (Duncan, 1970), the successor to Annie Lorrain Smith's handbook (James, 1986). British lichenology continues to be sustained by a healthy mixture of amateurs and professionals, as do other sub-disciplines: the 157 authors of *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.*, 2007) are a good illustration of this.

In recent decades, a third category of naturalist has become increasingly prominent – the citizen scientist. The term "citizen scientist" usually refers to members of the public who contribute to scientific research on a topic of which they have no specialist knowledge,

though there is considerable variability in this regard. For example, participants in a recent citizen science project on lichen diversity in Estonian forests "were not expected to be familiar with any lichen species" (Lõhmus *et al.*, 2023), whereas, at the other extreme, contributors to the Breeding Bird Survey are described as "skilled enthusiasts", and include individuals who have been submitting observations for 30 years (British Trust for Ornithology, 2024). Although it has been suggested that the "science" element is deficient in most citizen science projects (Davis *et al.*, 2023), citizen scientists have generated an enormous amount of valuable data through such endeavours as the Breeding Bird Survey, Big Butterfly Count (Butterfly Conservation, 2025) and National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS, 2025). If natural history really is "a discipline in danger" (Nanglu *et al.*, 2023), citizen scientists should undoubtedly be part of the mix and every effort made to attract more of them, both for their potential to augment natural history knowledge and because they may be inspired to become tomorrow's specialist naturalists – amateur and professional.

This issue includes an obituary for Norman Tait (Downie & Weddle, 2025) who was a prominent member of GNHS, serving as President from 1996 to 1998. As recounted therein, Norman was both a professional photographer in the University of Glasgow and a respected wildlife photographer, and he helped with illustrations for *The Glasgow Naturalist* from 1994, when the journal first incorporated colour photographs, until 2002. Norman died in December 2024 and in that month we also lost David Palmar, who was another prominent member of the society and wildlife photographer, as well as long-standing photographic convener and Newsletter editor. Both Norman and David leave behind extensive archives of natural history photographs that will be lasting legacies.

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