

NEWSLETTER 21 - APRIL 1998

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held on 13th March at Plockton Village Hall. The following members were elected to the Committee :-

Chairman	John Holt
Vice-Chairman	Pat Mucklow
Secretary	Brian Neath
Treasurer	Andree Bishop
Committee Members	Jean Camilli
	Tim Godfrey
	Iain Matheson

Roger Knight and Alistair MacKenzie stepped down as committee members this year and the Committee would like to record their thanks to both of them for their efforts on behalf of the Field Club during recent years.

The meeting was attended by 27 members and friends and the formal business was followed as usual by a very enjoyable social evening and buffet. Thanks are due again to Andree for all her hard work in preparing the food and to Sandra and Geoffrey Venables and Mary Martha MacRae for helping to transport the food and setting up the hall.

NATIONAL SPRING CLEAN

The Field Club has agreed to take part in this event which is being organised during April 1998 by the Keep Scotland Beautiful campaign. We have chosen Saturday 25th April for our clean-up day and Kirkton Bay as our priority eyesore. Kirkton Bay is one of the most important wildlife sites in Lochalsh but is also one of the most vulnerable shorelines for pollution from seaborne rubbish. The National Trust for Scotland has already planned a clean-up at Balmacara/Reraig in May. It is hoped that as many members as possible will spend some part of the 25th April, however little time they can spare, helping with the clean-up operation. Tim Godfrey is acting as our coordinator. Please contact Tim on 566 231 for further details of how you can help.

BOAT TRIP

The annual boat trip for 1998 will be to the Isle of Eigg on Saturday 20th June. The "Western Isles" will leave Armadale at 10.00am and we should have about 4 hours on the island. The cost will be £14 per head. Members should make their own arrangements for getting to Armadale. With the reduced rates on the Skye Bridge it is thought that this will be more viable than hiring a coach. A circular will be sent out in due course detailing the booking arrangements.

REFRESHMENTS AT MEETINGS

A volunteer is required to organise the drinks and biscuits which we all enjoy at the end of our meetings as we discuss the finer points of the lecture or put the world to right. Please contact the Secretary, Brian Neath, on 555 341.

WINTER 1997/98 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

Harbour Porpoises were present in Loch Duich throughout the winter again and were mainly seen at the head of the loch between Inverinate (east) and Ratagan. 5 on 3rd December was the most seen together. There were 2 in Kirkton Bay on 24th January and at least 30 off Rubha Mor, Plockton on 28th January, close to the date when c.80 were seen off Portneora last year. Otters were widespread and conspicuous during November, December and January and a Weasel crossed the A87 between Kirkton and Reraig on 11th January but I still have no records of Stoats in the area. Hares are also scarce in Lochalsh. I saw one in the car headlights on Carr Brae on 15th October. This was

probably a Mountain Hare but any records of Brown or Mountain Hares would be welcome.

Little systematic counting of shorebirds has been carried out in the NW Highlands so it was interesting to take part in the Non-estuarine Coastal Waterfowl Survey this winter. The whole shoreline between Ardelve and Duncraig was surveyed between 14th January and 2nd February and the following is a list of the 21 species recorded in order of abundance.

167 Oystercatchers	20 Goldeneye
145 Greylag Geese	16 Ringed Plover
128 Red-breasted Mergansers	16 Redshank
104 Wigeon	15 Eider
90 Curlews	13 Cormorants
75 Mallard	5 Goosander
69 Herons	4 Woodcock
64 Teal	2 Red-throated Divers
30 Turnstones	1 Pink-footed Goose
27 Great Northern Divers	1 Jack Snipe
20 Little Grebes	

Observers were not asked to record numbers of Shags, gulls or auks but I now wish that I had counted the numbers of Shags and Black Guillemots for my own interest to see how their numbers compared with the other common coastal species. If anyone would like a breakdown of where the birds were seen I would be pleased to give them a copy of the results.

Little Gull, Iceland Gull, Glaucous Gull and 2 Snow Buntings were seen during the fieldwork but the number and variety of birds of prey was disappointing.

The wintering flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese was down to 10 birds this winter so they still appear to be living on a knife-edge. It would be lovely to see them return next October with 4 or 5 juveniles to boost their numbers. Only 2 Whooper Swans spent the winter on Loch Shiel although Jean Camilli and Cath Stewart saw 11 birds on 10th December.

The lot of the Toad is not a happy one. As usual they were on the move from their hibernation sites to their breeding ponds and lochs during February. Their timing was unfortunate at Strathie as the movement coincided with the two nights of the drama festival at Plockton High School and many were killed on the road during the increased flow of traffic. Even those that do not have to cross roads still seem to have their problems. Loch Scalpaidh was full of dead Toads on 23rd March and it was rather a gruesome sight. Only the skins of their rear legs were left, the flesh seemed to have wasted away.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

