

NEWSLETTER 24 - JANUARY 1999

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please note that the AGM and Social Evening will be held at Plockton Village Hall on Friday 23rd April commencing at 7.30pm. Members are invited to come along and enjoy good food and good company.

THE WEATHER IN 1998

Once again we are indebted to Duncan Glen-Riddell for providing us with details of his weather readings from Reraig House, Balmacara. Equivalent figures for 1997 are shown in brackets.

	Rainfall		Temperature (Celcius)	
	mm	ins	ave. max	ave. min
January	241	9.49 (4.45)	8.6 (7.2)	2.3 (1.2)
February	317	12.48 (17.95)	10.0 (8.8)	5.0 (1.2)
March	175	6.89 (7.99)	9.4 (10.9)	3.1 (5.2)
April	66	2.60 (4.02)	11.1 (11.9)	2.4 (4.3)
May	59	2.32 (4.80)	15.2 (15.0)	6.7 (7.5)
June	113	4.45 (2.09)	16.4 (17.8)	7.1 (7.9)
July	140	5.51 (4.21)	16.5 (18.5)	9.3 (10.3)
August	128	5.04 (2.80)	17.4 (20.9)	9.4 (11.4)
September	76	2.99 (7.64)	17.9 (16.0)	8.8 (8.0)
October	231	9.09 (3.54)	12.4 (13.4)	5.1 (5.7)
November	255	10.04 (4.49)	9.8 (11.8)	2.7 (5.8)
December	283	11.14 (7.44)	10.1 (9.0)	3.4 (3.3)
Total	2084	82.05 (71.42)		

For once my memory of the year's weather correlates with the figures: April and May dry but cold, September also dry with the highest average monthly temperature of the year. February was the wettest month for the second year running which is very odd as the 30 year averages(1951/1981) show February to be the 4th driest month after April, May and June. The total rainfall for the year of 82.05" was 127% of the 30 year average. In fact 12 of the last 14 years have had more than the 30 year average suggesting that the annual average rainfall is increasing.

PUBLICATIONS

Two interesting publications relating to the Highlands are now available.

"Highland Butterflies a provisional atlas" is the first book to be produced by the Highland Biological Recording Group. It shows detailed distribution maps of the 28 species of butterfly which are recorded regularly within Highland Region. Copies can be obtained from Ian Evans, Calltuinn, Nedd, Drumbeg, By Lairg, Sutherland, IV27 4NN. The price is £3.95 plus 50p postage and cheques should be made payable to Highland Biological Recording Group. Support for this publication will help to finance other projects, a mammal atlas being the next objective.

The 1996 Highland Bird Report covers Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Skye and the Small Isles. It is professionally published, beautifully illustrated and contains details of the 241 species recorded including 149 breeding species. It represents a major personal achievement by Colin Croke who is the recorder for this vast area. This is the second year that he has produced the annual report to this standard and similar future reports are dependent on successful sales of the 1996 report. Copies can be obtained from Colin at 6 George Street, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8PU. The price is £5.00 plus 50p postage and cheques should be made payable to Colin Croke.

AUTUMN 1998 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

This period saw some of the most spectacular bird movements seen locally for many years. Between 30th September and 5th October there was a huge passage of wild geese. It must have been exceptional because I have never known so many people to comment on "the geese", including many who have never previously passed on wildlife observations. I saw far more skeins passing over Carr Brae than ever before and as usual they were mainly heading south-east or south-south-east following the length of Loch Duich. Almost certainly the majority would have been Pink-footed Geese on their way from their breeding grounds in Iceland to the Tayside area where many thousands spend the winter months.

The migration of the winter thrushes (Redwings and Fieldfares) began very quietly and rather late for the 3rd year running. I saw my first Redwings on 6th October but no Fieldfares until 24th when the first significant movement of Redwings took place. It still appeared at this stage that the vast crop of Rowan berries would go to waste as the small numbers of Redwings had made little impact and heavy rain was beginning to knock the berries to the ground. However from 22nd to 25th November there was the most phenomenal movement of Fieldfares that I have ever witnessed. I estimated over 3000 passing south-east over Carr Brae, saw 1700 heading south past Lochalsh Dam in less than an hour on 23rd and over 1000 on the Plock of Kyle on 24th. Flocks would suddenly descend with a rush of wings if they spotted any berries and what was left of the Rowan crop had gone in most areas by the 25th. Unusually these large flocks appeared to be single species flocks with few if any Redwings amongst them. Redwing numbers remained relatively low and Fieldfare numbers dropped rapidly after the 25th.

28 Whooper Swans at the head of Loch Duich on 15th October provided another spectacle, especially when all but one took off and circled round making a terrific noise. It was good to see 9 juvenile birds amongst them. October also produced the first Red Kite record for Lochalsh that I know of when one, possibly two, flew up Carr Brae on 7th, the same day that a Hoopoe was seen in Kyle. Roy and Josephine Dean also saw a Red Kite flying east over Lochcarron on 5th October.

A very late Ring Ouzel at Dubh-aird on 17th October (rarely seen locally after July) may have been part of the same movement that saw unprecedented numbers in Kent from 7th-10th October. On 15th November there were 2 exceptionally late Swallows feeding over our garden and 3 days later Jean Camilli saw one in their garden at Ratagan.

The extent of the effect of the weather on the butterfly season can be gauged from my butterfly records submitted to the Highland Biological Recording Group. In 1996 I sent in 203 records, in 1997 233 records and in 1998 only 102 records. Only Green Hairstreak and Speckled Wood were observed in anywhere near their usual numbers. I didn't see a Red Admiral until 23rd September but they were then widespread for about two weeks.

Moth numbers were also generally disappointing but the warmer weather in September encouraged more to emerge and no less than 32 species were attracted to our windows including several that I hadn't seen before. These included Yellow-ringed Carpet, Canary-shouldered Thorn, Marbled Coronet (a very late date) and Grey Chi.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)

