

NEWSLETTER 30 - AUGUST 2000

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual subscriptions fall due in September. To ensure that we are able to keep our membership records up to date please complete the enclosed slip and return to the treasurer along with your subscription.

PROGRAMME FOR 2000/2001

All meetings will be held in Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 8.00pm.

The first four talks of the new season will be as follows:-

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| 6th October | The World of Bats
Bob Laing |
| 10th November | This is Beneath You - A Light-hearted Look At Volcanoes
Allan Aitken |
| 8th December | Tierra del Fuego - The Uttermost Part of the Earth
Phil Swainson |
| 12th January | Wintering Birds in Lochalsh
Brian Neath |

2000 BOAT TRIP

The jinx on our proposed outing to Loch Coruisk continued with the forecast threatening force 6 to 7 gales blowing up in the afternoon of 10th June. Bruce Watt decided that it was too risky to round the Point of Sleat but he agreed to take us across to Knoydart instead and despite the initial disappointment of missing out on Coruisk again it turned out to be a memorable and highly enjoyable day. As we entered Loch Nevis the sun came out, the sea was calm and the scenery was at its best. We were able to make two landings at Camasunary and Inverie and for most of us it was the first time that we had sailed to the head of the loch and taken advantage of the pier there. However one couple on board confessed to having spent part of their honeymoon there! The rain did not start until we were just leaving Inverie and although the Sound of Sleat was a wee bit choppy for the return crossing to Armadale everyone seemed to agree that it had been the right decision on the day and had been a very worthwhile outing.

SPRING/EARLY SUMMER 2000 - WILDLIFE REPORTS (Compiled by Brian Neath 01599 555341)

Following the exceptionally late House Martin at Killilan on 2nd November 1999 one or two also returned exceptionally early to Dornie and Carr Brae from 24th April. My previous earliest arrival date had been 1st May. For the third successive year I was away for two weeks during April so missed the arrival of some of the summer migrants. When I returned on the 24th Swallows, Cuckoos and Tree Pipit were already in evidence as well as the expected Willow Warblers. Josephine and Roy Dean had recorded Swallow and Cuckoo on 20th and Common Sandpiper on 21st. There was a Sand Martin feeding over Carr Brae with the previously mentioned House Martins and Swallows on 24th and 26th. Sand Martins are usually seen near or over water and locally the best places to see them are along the Rivers Croe, Ling and Elchaig. This was only the second time that I had recorded Sand Martin over our garden. By the end of April Whinchat and Wood Warbler had also arrived and Mike Forsyth had heard the first Grasshopper Warbler of the year at Ardelve on 29th.

The most surprising report during April was of a Nuthatch feeding on peanuts at Allt nan Sugh on 21st. Nuthatches breed regularly in Scotland only just inside the border in Berwickshire and Dumfries and have only recently been seen for the first time in Fife. As the species is not usually migratory its occurrence so far north is totally unexpected. Kenneth and Rowena Oliver are familiar with the species in Surrey and as it is such a distinctive bird which feeds upside down on peanuts it is hard to imagine that they could have mis-identified it. Like the Green Woodpecker reported at Letterfearn last year the disappointing aspect was that it was seen only once. One would have expected that wandering birds that are attracted to peanut feeders would stay around for a while once they had found a reliable source of food.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is the only resident woodpecker in Lochalsh and although it can be noisy at times on the whole it is rather secretive. Roger and Sheena Knight have been fortunate, therefore, to have one take up residence in their garden since the beginning of July and become a regular feeder on peanuts.

A Red-legged Partridge near Loch Duich School, Inverinate on 14th May (unfortunately a road casualty) was another unexpected occurrence. The initial assumption that it had been released by the Inverinate Estate was quickly ruled out when it turned out that the person reporting the accident works on the estate and was not aware of any local releases. Very few are reported in the Highlands and these are mainly in Badenoch and Strathspey and Easter Ross where some birds have been introduced by shooting interests.

The local Greylag Geese had another successful breeding season. A flock of 78 at Kirkton on 12th July included 23 juveniles. Eilean Tioram off Ardelve has recently become one of the main breeding sites and at least 15 chicks were reared there this year. Interestingly, since the geese started to nest there, the number of Herring Gulls breeding on the island has decreased dramatically. Could these developments be directly related? Are the geese sufficiently intimidating to drive away such aggressive birds as Herring Gulls?

My movements around Lochalsh have been severely restricted this year by an ageing dog who can now walk only a very short distance. However one bonus from this otherwise frustrating limitation has been to "discover" the wonderful flower meadow between the Episcopal Church and Nostie Power Station. The progression of wildflowers from Primrose, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Marsh Marigold, Cuckooflower and Ramsons through to Lady's Mantle, Water Avens, Greater Stitchwort, Northern Marsh Orchid, Greater Butterfly Orchid and Yellow Rattle and then on to Meadowsweet, Common Valerian, Yarrow, Lesser Knapweed and Devil's Bit Scabious was impressive to say the least in such a small area. The abundance of flowers did not, however, produce an abundance of butterflies although there were Orange-tips there in May and large numbers of Scotch Argus from late July. The area also produced my only Garden Warbler of the year and good numbers of Chimney Sweeper moths.

The year 2000 saw an influx of Painted Lady butterflies. The only other year in recent times in which this migrant butterfly reached this far north in numbers was 1996 when I recorded over 70 individuals. This year I saw only 4 but it was nice to have them in Lochalsh again. If anyone saw larger numbers I would be interested to hear about them.