

NEWSLETTER 35 - NOVEMBER 2001

PROGRAMME FOR 2001/2002

All meetings will be held at Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm except where indicated otherwise.

7 th December 2001	Muckle Flugga to the Mull of Kintyre – A tour through Scotland's islands Norman Newton
11 th January 2002	Scottish Geology in One Hour Stephen Cribb
8 th February 2002	Across the Atlantic Single-Handed Jock Macleod Plockton Village Hall at 8.00pm
8 th March 2002	Balmacara Estate - The Management Plan for 2001-2006 Iain Turnbull
23 rd March 2002	AGM and Social Evening Achmore Village Hall at 7.30pm
26 th April 2002	Highland Moths David Barbour

BOAT TRIP TO MUCK

Due to foot and mouth restrictions and then the difficulty of finding a Saturday when both the tide was satisfactory and Bruce Watt was free to accommodate us, our boat trip was much later than usual this year. However in the end this worked in our favour as we had a superb day on the Isle of Muck on 25th August. Not that it appeared that way as we set off from Armadale under an overcast sky and then ran into some heavy showers. As we approached Eigg the sky was looking ominously black but as we rounded the south east corner of Eigg and had our first view of Muck it began to brighten and the rest of the day was beautiful.

Despite the weather on the outward journey the sea was not rough and there were plenty of seabirds to watch including 3 Great Skuas (or Bonxies), an Arctic Skua chasing terns off Eigg, some good close views of Gannets and Fulmars and the usual good numbers of Manx Shearwaters, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills. Tom Weale was fairly certain that he saw a Little Gull and there were some distant views of unidentified divers in flight.

We were made very welcome on the island. Lawrence MacEwan not only helped to ferry us across to the jetty but also made himself available for the whole of our stay to answer questions and chat to those taking advantage of the excellent café and shop. Transport was also made available to the lovely beach at the far end of the road where there was a small mixed flock of Ringed Plovers, Dunlin and Turnstones on the shore and good numbers of Common Seals hauled out on the rocks. A stray Canada Goose amongst a flock of 100 or so Greylag Geese was an unexpected find. It really is a magical island and despite its small size 3 hours was just not long enough.

The return journey was brilliant as by now the clouds had lifted even from the peaks of Rum so the views of island and mainland mountains were at their best. As a grand finale we saw a Minke Whale just before reaching the Point of Sleat; a fitting climax to a memorable day.

SUMMER/EARLY AUTUMN 2001 - WILDLIFE REPORTS (Compiled by Brian Neath 01599 555 341)

A flock of about 300 Greylag Geese off Glas Eilean on 22nd June was almost certainly a record count for Lochalsh. The geese were seen by Pat and Roger Cottis from the Ardintoul side of Loch Alsh, an aspect of the island that few people ever see. This suggests another good breeding season for the Greylags and they certainly bred again on Eilean Tioram. I witnessed 7 pairs swimming across from this island to Totaig Bay on 12th June, 5 of these having broods of between 2 and 6 goslings trailing along behind them.

The Plock of Kyle produced my 2nd record of Sandwich Tern for Lochalsh on 3rd July and a flock of about 120 Redpolls on 15th August.

Some birds return to their wintering grounds as early as August and there were Wigeon, Teal and a Little Grebe in Kirkton Bay on 27th and 7 Turnstones in Balmacara Bay on 31st. By 4th October there were 64 Wigeon in Balmacara Bay, the largest flock I have seen at this site, although they often exceed 100 in the quieter Kirkton Bay.

The first southerly movements of geese were reported on the evening of 16th September and the following morning. Skeins were observed over Balmacara by Eleanor and Hubert Hunton, over Kyle by Charlotte Bell and Julie Neath and over Plockton by Liliias Simpson. I didn't see any following the regular south-easterly route along Loch Duich until 28th September. Although too high to identify for certain these would almost certainly be Pink-footed Geese.

The first 5 Redwings were seen on Carr Brae on 30th September and the first 4 Fieldfares followed on 6th October. As usual Roger Cottis recorded them much earlier in Sleat with Redwings on 20th September and Fieldfares on 28th. It is interesting that the winter thrushes should appear so consistently earlier on nearby Skye than on the mainland.

Some summer migrants usually linger on well after the first of the winter visitors have arrived. However the only such lingerers that I came across this year were a Spotted Flycatcher in our garden on 3rd and 10th September and Swallows, which were widespread until 25th September with two still present at Erbusaig on 9th October. The poor weather may have been responsible for the apparent absence of House Martins, Whinchats and Willow Warblers during the first half of September.

An adult White-tailed Eagle was seen at Avernish by Alistair Earnshaw on 27th August and some visitors staying in Avernish also saw one there towards the end of October. A Black-throated Diver, an adult Gannet and a storm-driven Manx Shearwater were all seen in Nostie Bay on 3rd October.

Whilst defrosting our freezer I was surprised to find a perfectly preserved Streamer moth. How it had managed to find its way into the fast freeze compartment is a complete mystery as the door to this compartment is very rarely opened. Earwigs often work their way into the rubber seal of the freezer door but even they do not enter the freezer itself.

I was pleased to see my first Red Sword-grass moth since 1997 on 20th September with four more sightings during September and October. This large moth somehow manages to fold its wings in such a way that it resembles a thin twig. Visiting naturalists who carried out some moth trapping at Avernish during October caught as many as 4 of these moths on the 20th and 23rd. Feathered Thorn were again numerous during October and it was interesting to see 5 attracted to the outside lights at Kirkton Church Hall after our October meeting. A maximum of 7 were attracted to our windows on Carr Brae on 20th October.

For the first time since 1994 I didn't see a single Red Admiral in our garden this year and recorded only one in the Lochalsh area – at Ardelve on 6th July. This contrasts with 29 sightings in 2000 and 20 in 1999. If anybody had any positive sightings during 2001 I would be pleased to receive details. Red Admirals are usually the only butterflies to be seen locally during October. In their absence my latest butterflies were Small Tortoiseshell on 23rd September and Speckled Wood on 29th September. I have recorded Speckled Wood as late as 30th September but have yet to see one in October.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

You are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1st September. If you wish to renew your membership please send your subscription to Andree along with the pay-in slip enclosed with the August newsletter. I can provide extra slips for any which have been lost. We regret that we cannot continue to send out newsletters (or to subsidize the indoor meetings) to those who do not renew their membership.