

NEWSLETTER 36 - JANUARY 2002

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please note that the date of the AGM and Social Evening has been changed to Saturday, 16th March. The time and venue remain the same i.e. 7.30pm at Achmore Village Hall.

THE WEATHER IN 2001

The eagerly awaited weather data is with us once again, courtesy of Duncan Glen-Riddell. As usual the readings were taken at Reraig House, Balmacara and the figures in brackets show the 17 year averages from 1985 to 2001.

	Rainfall		Temperature (Celsius)			
	mm	ins	ave max		ave min	
January	134	5.28 (8.78)	6.9	(7.60)	0.10	(1.60)
February	89	3.50 (7.95)	8.0	(8.27)	0.80	(1.52)
March	78	3.07 (8.03)	10.4	(9.70)	0.40	(2.38)
April	92	3.62 (4.21)	11.3	(11.79)	2.50	(3.38)
May	67	2.64 (3.23)	17.6	(15.70)	6.60	(5.94)
June	172	6.77 (3.70)	16.4	(17.13)	7.30	(7.78)
July	104	4.09 (4.25)	17.5	(18.53)	9.50	(9.71)
August	123	4.84 (5.39)	19.1	(18.36)	9.70	(9.59)
September	158	6.22 (6.10)	16.3	(16.39)	7.90	(7.78)
October	315	12.40 (8.39)	15.4	(13.30)	8.90	(6.14)
November	223	8.78 (8.03)	10.6	(9.94)	4.60	(3.39)
December	176	6.93 (8.46)	8.1	(8.00)	1.20	(1.82)
Total	1731	68.14 (76.41)				

The most rainfall recorded on any one day during 2001 was 52mm (2.05ins) on the unlikely date of 19th June, followed closely by 48mm (1.89ins) and 47mm (1.85ins) on two days in October. The longest dry spell was 15 days from 14th to 28th March. For the second year running October was the wettest month, and by a large margin. It is rapidly catching up on January and February as a candidate for the wettest month in the overall averages. The high rainfall on 19th June resulted in it being the wettest June since records began in 1985. The total rainfall for the year was the lowest since 1996. Despite the disappointing summer and autumn, rainfall was actually less than the average in all months except June, September, October and November; significantly less in the winter months.

The highest temperatures recorded were all in May: 26 degrees on 10th, 11th and 12th, 27 degrees on 22nd and 25 degrees on 24th. The usual warmest months of July and August never exceeded 23 and 22 degrees respectively but August still managed to achieve a higher average maximum for the whole month than May, This was because the maximum daily temperatures in August were never less than 16 degrees whereas those in May fell below 16 degrees on 15 days. The exceptionally low average minimum temperatures from January to March coincided with a high number of rain-free days for this time of year i.e. 14 days in January, 14 in February and 21 in March, suggesting clear night skies with frost.

CETACEANS

Whales, dolphins and porpoises are collectively known as cetaceans. Cetacean-watching has become a popular hobby and tourist attraction and the north west coast of Scotland is being recognised more and more as an important area for a wide variety of species. This is largely due to the work of the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust based on the Isle of Mull. Members may remember that we had a talk given by a representative of the Trust in April 1998. HWDT contributes regularly to the wildlife reports section in the respected journal "British Wildlife" and in the December issue a summary is given of sightings during 2001. Most of the sightings were between May and August in the waters off Mull, Ardnamurchan, Coll and Eigg. Species reported were Minke Whale, Long-finned Pilot Whale, Killer Whale, Bottlenose Dolphin, Common Dolphin, White-beaked Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise as well as Basking Shark (which is a fish of course not a cetacean). The HWDT keeps a database of sightings and is keen to receive reports from a wider area of the west coast and throughout the year. Roger Cottis and myself have passed on our records for Skye and Lochalsh and would be happy to forward records from other members of the Field Club. The usual information is required of date, location (with grid reference if possible), numbers and any comments on

behaviour, ages etc. More information is available on the website www.hwtdt.org

Our sea lochs do not attract such a range of species as the more open seas around the Small Isles and The Minch. However until we submitted our records it wasn't generally known that Harbour Porpoises are present in inshore waters throughout the year, sometimes in large numbers. Other species which have occurred locally in recent years include Northern Bottlenose Whale, Bottlenose Dolphin and Common Dolphin. During 2001 Harbour Porpoises were again recorded throughout the year and on 29th March I was fortunate to see a pod of about 12 Bottlenose Dolphins swimming purposefully round Balmacara Bay close to the shore heading towards Kyle. During early September Dr Mary Macrae heard what was almost certainly a whale blowing in Balmacara Bay. I had a similar experience on 4th September 2000 when I heard a similar blowing sound in Loch Duich and turned to see a major disturbance in the water but nothing resurfaced. Fortunately on that occasion two Northern Bottlenose Whales were seen at the head of the loch later the same day, which more or less confirmed that I had indeed heard a whale. During 2001 neither Roger nor I heard of any subsequent sightings of these whales but this is the time of year when Northern Bottlenose Whales also appeared in Broadford Bay in 1998. So there is a distinct possibility that this is what Dr Mary heard on this occasion.

On 17th January this year I found two dead young Striped Dolphins on the beach at Glenelg. The carcasses were collected by Bob Reid of the Scottish Agricultural College in Inverness, and we are awaiting his report on the cause of death and other details. Any strandings of live or dead cetaceans should be reported immediately to the SAC on 01463 243030. Initial information required for dead strandings is (1) date found; (2) exact position where found; (3) finder's name, address & tel. no.; (4) number of individuals found; (5) initial species identification; (6) length; (7) condition of carcass; (8) can carcass be collected? However don't delay notification if all information is not to hand.

THE ISLAND OF RUM

Anyone with an interest in the history of the Inner Hebrides would be well advised to obtain a copy of John Love's new book "Rum A Landscape Without Figures" published by Birlinn, Edinburgh (2001). John is a former secretary of the South West Ross Field Club and one of our regular guest speakers. It is primarily a human history of the island dating back to the Mesolithic period but the first chapter describes the complex geology of the island in some detail and inevitably there are frequent references to eagles, seabirds and deer. It is hard to imagine that there can be any details of the island's inhabitants that John has not uncovered in his research for this book. Native islanders and their descendents must be extremely grateful to John for telling their story.

SPONSORED TRAVERSE OF THE CUILLIN RIDGE

Luc Camilli is to be congratulated on achieving his ambition of completing a guided traverse of the Cuillin Ridge in September. Not only that but he persuaded friends and neighbours to sponsor him and so raised over £1800 towards a new oncology unit for Broadford Hospital. Luc underwent major surgery at the hospital in 1998 and on handing over the cheque he expressed his thanks to Mr John Ball and other staff for looking after him so well.



Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341). Please phone through your observations for inclusion in future newsletters. Wildlife reports for late autumn and winter postponed until the April 2002 Newsletter.