

NEWSLETTER 43 - NOVEMBER 2003

PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY to APRIL 2004

Please note that the meeting on 13th February will be held in the afternoon. Jonathon and Kate will bring along some of the birds that they are rehabilitating. Also please note that the March meeting will be held on a Thursday and not the usual Friday. Both of these meetings will be held at Achmore Village Hall.

Friday, 16 th January	From Berneray to Barra Head – Machair, Moor and Seabirds John Love Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm
Friday, 6 th February	The Work of Wild Aid Jonathon and Kate Hodges Achmore Village Hall at <u>2.30pm</u>
<u>Thursday</u> , 11 th March	The Changing Role of Forestry Malcolm Wield Achmore Village Hall at 8.00pm
Friday, 2 nd April	A.G.M. Lochalsh Hotel, Kyle at 7.00pm
Friday, 23 rd April	The Isle of Arran Derrick Warner Kirkton Church Hall at 8.00pm

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

You are reminded that subscriptions became due on 1st September. If you have not already done so please send your subscription together with the pay-in slip to Mrs. V. Beaton, Shalloo, Old Plock Road, Kyle. Single membership remains at £10 and family membership at £15. For those who joined in January 2003, or later, renewal can be deferred until September 2004.

IDENTIFICATION GUIDES

The bi-monthly magazine “British Wildlife” is one of the best publishing ventures to have emerged in recent years. The range of subjects covered and the standard of the articles, illustrations and printing are second to none.

British Wildlife Publishing has now branched out into publishing field guides and the three produced so far have upheld the high standards set by the magazine. The “Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland” (£18.95), the “Pocket Guide to the Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland” (£8.95) and the “Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland” (£29.95) are all leaders in their field and are highly recommended. They have the advantage, as their titles indicate, of covering only those species which have been recorded in the British Isles, so common species are not lost amongst numerous continental species as is often the case with modern field guides. They are also comprehensive, including all known British species recorded at the time of publication. The moth guide is a particularly fine achievement, being the first field guide to illustrate all the British and Irish macro moths. The moths are shown in their natural resting postures rather than pinned out, making identification that much easier. £29.95 is not an unreasonable price for such a comprehensive guide; the previous “bible” for moth enthusiasts, Bernard Skinner’s “Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles”, costs over £40. Try the butterfly guide first – it shows the eggs, caterpillars, chrysalis and adults as well as a distribution map for all species. The books can be obtained post free from British Wildlife Publishing, Lower Barn, Rooks Farm, Rotherwick, Hook, Hampshire, RG27 9BG; telephone 01256 760663; website www.britishwildlife.com

SUMMER/AUTUMN 2003 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

The August newsletter concentrated on exceptionally early events such as the early emergence of bumblebees and butterflies, which have been such a characteristic feature of 2003. A chance visit to Rowena and Kenneth Oliver at Allt-nan-Sugh, near Sallachy in October revealed some even more extraordinary dates for butterflies. Their diary showed that they had seen a Red Admiral in their garden on 18th March, Small Tortoiseshell on 6th April, Orange-tip on 9th April, Speckled Wood on 15th April and Green Hairstreak on 16th April. The dates for the last three species are all several days earlier than those thought previously to be record early dates. The Red Admiral would almost certainly have been an individual which had successfully hibernated locally; an unusual occurrence at this latitude. The same probably applies to a number of sightings of Peacock butterflies between 19th and 21st April. One was seen at Allt-nan-Sugh on 19th and 20th

April, one on Carr Brae on 20th April and one in Glen Elchaig on 21st April. These are the first records of Peacock butterfly that I know of in Lochalsh. We had thought that the influx of these butterflies on the east coast in autumn 2002 had failed to reach the north west but it appears that one or two may well have done so and successfully hibernated. At least they must have over-wintered somewhere in the Highlands to appear here in April. The Peacock is one of several butterflies which are spreading northwards in Britain, including the Comma, the Gatekeeper and the Ringlet.

2003 turned out to be the best year for Painted Lady butterflies since 1996. However the main influx this year was in September with odd individuals still present until at least 8th October. In 1996 the largest numbers were seen in June. The most I saw together was 4 on marjoram plants in our garden, but Jean and Luc Camilli had huge numbers attracted to the fruit on a greengage tree. It was another good year for Speckled Wood and Scotch Argus. Both species seem to go from strength to strength. I at last recorded my first October Speckled Wood, but only on the 1st of the month; a change in the weather on the 2nd brought its flight period to an end. I was amazed to find good numbers of Scotch Argus at more than 900m along the South Shiel Ridge on 5th August whilst others were seen at sea level on the shore at Glenelg the following day. The above field guide gives the range in Britain as up to 500m.

As usual the arrival of migrant butterflies such as Red Admiral and Painted Lady was accompanied by several moth species. The most frequently seen migrant moth at this latitude is the Silver Y and this was the case again this year. In Britain as a whole there was the largest ever influx of Convolvulus Hawk-moths and Hummingbird Hawk-moths. Several of the former arrived in Lochcarron and on Skye and a Death's Head Hawk-moth was also found on Skye. The Convolvulus Hawk-moth feeds at dusk on flowers such as nicotiana and petunia but the Hummingbird Hawk-moth feeds during the day on buddleia, phlox and lilac and is often mistaken for a hummingbird. I would be interested to hear of any sightings of hawk-moths in Lochalsh; I'm sure there must have been some this year.

Amongst the most interesting bird observations during this period were a pair of Dotterel with chicks on one of the Kintail peaks in July, two or three sightings of an Osprey in Glenelg, a Barnacle Goose in Loch Carron during July and a Common (or Scarlet) Rosefinch in Balmacara Square in late May. Carole and Tom Weale watched a Peregrine eating a pigeon or dove right outside their house at Barleyport on 3rd October and reported a Merlin in the same area the following week. Following a blank year in 2002 it was pleasing to have two Crossbill sightings at Strathie on 7th June and Upper Sandaig on 11th August.

The post-breeding flock of Greylag Geese built up to about 200 off Glas Eilean on 30th June and a flock of about 180 was seen at Slumbay, Lochcarron on 14th July. 11 Pink-footed Geese flew south east over Loch Duich on 15th September and migrating geese, probably of the same species, were widely reported on the 19th and 20th September, heading in a southerly or south-easterly direction. Other birds returning from their northern breeding grounds included 4 Turnstones at Balmacara on 19th August, a Great Northern Diver and 3 Goldeneye in Bagh an t'Strathaidh on 12th October, a Woodcock on Carr Brae on 23rd October and a Brambling at Ardelve Point on 29th October.

For the first time I failed to locate a single Ring Ouzel during the breeding season, but a late migrant was seen briefly on Carr Brae on 9th October, probably caught up with the southerly movement of Redwings. Single Redwings were seen in Dornie on 26th September and in Ardelve on 2nd October but it was the middle of October before substantial flocks of Redwings and Fieldfares appeared. Many people reported large flocks of these thrushes plundering the rowan berries, and stripping the trees in a day or two.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)