

NEWSLETTER 48 - JANUARY 2005

REVISED PROGRAMME

Dr James Cobb was unable to travel up from Fife to give his talk on 14th January so John Holt moved forward his talk on Alpines to that date. The remainder of the programme will now be as follows:

Friday, 18 th February	Bird Migration on the East Coast Dr. James Cobb Achmore Village Hall at <u>2:30pm</u>
Friday, 11 th March	The Birds of Skye Bob McMillan Plockton Village Hall at 8:00pm
Friday, 15 th April	AGM Gateway Restaurant, Kyle at 7:00pm
Friday, 22 nd April	Bluebell Secrets – <i>and a lot more</i> Dr. James Merryweather Kirkton Church Hall at 8:00pm

THE WEATHER IN 2004

After what seemed to be one of the worst years for weather since at least 1998 Duncan Glen-Riddell's weather readings for 2004 have been anticipated with even more interest than usual. The readings at Reraig House are shown below along with the 1985 to 2000 average figures in brackets.

	Rainfall		Temperature (Celsius)	
	mm	ins	ave max	ave min
January	314	12.36 (9.02)	7.94 (7.2)	2.39 (1.7)
February	192	7.56 (8.23)	8.72 (7.8)	0.66 (1.5)
March	193	7.60 (8.35)	11.06 (9.1)	2.55 (2.5)
April	159	6.26 (4.25)	12.40 (11.1)	5.17 (3.4)
May	62	2.44 (3.27)	15.29 (14.7)	5.73 (5.9)
June	132	5.20 (3.50)	16.73 (16.2)	8.90 (7.8)
July	108	4.25 (4.25)	18.52 (17.5)	9.65 (9.7)
August	142	5.59 (5.43)	20.97 (17.2)	11.06 (9.6)
September	303	11.93 (6.06)	17.23 (15.5)	10.09 (7.8)
October	227	8.94 (8.07)	12.97 (12.4)	5.07 (6.0)
November	147	5.79 (7.95)	10.83 (9.3)	4.27 (3.4)
December	385	15.16 (8.54)	9.50 (7.6)	3.27 (1.9)
Totals	2364	93.07 (76.93)		

The rainfall total for the year was 2364mm or 93.07ins and this dramatically bucked the trend over the last four years of progressively less rain than the year before. It represents a 52% increase over the 61.02ins of rain in 2003. However it was not the wettest year since Duncan began keeping records in 1985. 1989, 1990 and 1992 all had higher rainfall, 1990 being the wettest of all with 100.51ins. As can be seen from the figures, February, March, May and November had less than average rainfall but all other months had more than average. January, September and December were the main culprits with 137%, 197% and 178% of the monthly averages respectively. The wettest days were 18th January (2.32ins) and 14th December (2.28ins). The best dry spells were from 7th to 28th May when just 22mm (0.87ins) of rain fell but half of that was on one day, and 25th July to 8th August when only 6mm (0.24ins) of rain fell.

Although it did not seem to be a particularly warm year the average monthly maximum temperatures were higher than the average maximum temperatures from 1985 to 2000 in all twelve months. The average minimum temperatures were also higher than or equal to the 16 year averages except for February, May and October. The highest temperature of 30 degrees Celsius was recorded on 8th August and the lowest temperature of -7 degrees Celsius was recorded on 28th February.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

You are reminded that subscriptions became due on 1st September. A few subscriptions are still outstanding so if you have not paid and wish to continue your membership please send your subscription to the Treasurer, Mrs V. Beaton, Shalloy, Old Plock Road, Kyle.

AUTUMN/WINTER 2004/2005 – WILDLIFE REPORTS

The exceptional numbers of Waxwings did not stay around for very long. I saw about 90 on the eastern outskirts of Kyle on

1st November and about 60 near Balmacara Square later the same day but I heard of no large flocks any later than 3rd November. A single bird, which drank from a puddle in our garden on Carr Brae on 10th November, was a first for the garden. The last report was of 6 or 7 birds seen by Bill Ramsay on 19th November just outside his garden in Kyle. Why the Waxwings moved on when there were still plenty of berries available is something of a mystery. At first this seemed to be good news for our wintering Blackbirds and thrushes but they in turn had not finished off the berries before the heavy rain and gales battered most of the remaining crop to the ground. The unprecedented numbers of Waxwings that flooded into the British Isles during late October and November were considered to originate from much further east in northern Europe than the usual Waxwings that periodically arrive in Britain. At the same time Bullfinches of the northern race arrived in large numbers and these were also from further east than the usual migrant birds. They could be identified by their strange trumpeting calls, which were quite different to the calls of our resident birds and yet still had a Bullfinch tone to them

Eleanor and Hubert Hunton were amazed to see a Swallow in their garden at Coilliemore on 6th December. This was the second time in three years that Swallows have been recorded locally in December. There were three reports of Barn Owl road casualties during November and December, from Inverinate, the Clachan Duich causeway and between Auchtertyre and Kirkton. For such an uncommon bird this is a tragic loss, but it may indicate that the Barn Owl is more numerous than the few live sightings suggest. Certainly they seem to be more strictly nocturnal here than in lowland areas and this makes them that much more difficult to see. A flock of 35 to 40 Yellowhammers at Ardelve on 12th December was the most I have ever seen in Lochalsh. Moira and Adrian Quinn have been getting about 30 Yellowhammers feeding in their garden at Conchra recently and no doubt the same birds are involved. A few Bramblings have been seen feeding on beech mast with flocks of Chaffinches at Ardelve, Glenelg and Ratagan but none have been reported from gardens so far this winter. On 28th December there were five Crossbills in Strome Wood, where Dr John Adamson had seen some earlier in the year.

Some interesting bird sightings did not appear in the November Newsletter as they were overshadowed at the time by the Waxwing invasion. A Sanderling in Balmacara Bay on 30th August was the first to be recorded in Lochalsh. A juvenile Golden Eagle near Loch Palascaig on 24th September was well away from the regular eagle haunts. It may well have been a wanderer from Skye or Raasay rather than from further inland. A flock of 22 Tufted Duck and two Scaup near Kintail Lodge on 7th October was a rare sighting for Loch Duich. It was only my second Lochalsh record of Tufted Duck and my fourth record of Scaup.

MOTH RECORDS IN 2004

2004 was a remarkable year for moths. Pat Mucklow was surprised to find a Silver Y flying about in her house on 5th February. This migrant species is rarely seen in winter. Whether this individual had been trying to hibernate or whether it was a fresh arrival we will never know but a lot of immigrants had arrived on the south coast of England at the start of the year. Josephine Dean found a Bedstraw Hawk-moth, a rare migrant, resting in her garden at Lochcarron on 14th August.

I recorded 195 species of macro-moths during the year and increased my personal checklist of macro-moths seen in Lochalsh to 228 and the overall Lochalsh list to 257. July was the most amazing month with 95 species recorded. On the night of 28th July no fewer than 70 species were attracted to my Robinson trap. The Nationally Scarce A Barred Carpet and Nationally Scarce B Scotch Annulet were seen at both Carr Brae and Drumbuie; Yellow-ringed Carpet, Manchester Treble-bar, Plain Clay and Square Spotted Clay (all Nb) were seen at Carr Brae and Great Brocade (Nb) was seen at Drumbuie. Three species of moth were recorded in Lochalsh well to the north or north west of their previously known range. V-Pug was seen in Kyle (by Pat Mucklow) and at Carr Brae; Scorched Wing and Lempke's Gold Spot were seen at Carr Brae. The Drumbuie moths were attracted to Ishbel Cameron's trap. Ishbel's first year of moth trapping was remarkably successful and she recorded what was probably the first Bordered Grey (Na) to be seen in Lochalsh as well as some of the large spectacular moths such as Poplar Hawk-moth, Elephant Hawk-moth and Garden Tiger.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341). Recent observations and/or short articles always welcome.