



NEWSLETTER 67 - JANUARY 2010

PROGRAMME

We have three very interesting meetings to look forward to including Audrey Sinclair's long awaited talk on bee-keeping. For the March meeting we have Tom Prescott, Butterfly Conservation Scotland's Species Conservation Officer illustrating his work on butterflies and moths. Tom is a very good speaker and will have up to date news of some of our rarer species. Jane Bowman's talk in April is not to be missed. She has a knack of spotting all kinds of mini-beasts and takes the most amazing photographs. She has discovered some very rare and unexpected species in Glen Moriston in the last few years. All meetings will be at Kirkton Church Hall commencing at 7.30pm.

Friday 19 th February	As Busy as a Bee Audrey Sinclair
Friday 12 th March	The Conservation of Butterflies and Moths in Scotland Tom Prescott
Friday 16 th April	The Intriguing Insects of Glen Moriston Jane Bowman

THE WEATHER IN 2009

Once again I was surprised how much rainfall was recorded at Reraig in what I had considered to be another pretty good year weather wise. As in 2008 I had another record total of butterfly sightings for the year and during 2009 I missed only one week's visit to my butterfly transect due to the weather. It was surprising therefore to find that higher rainfall than the average figures for the period 1985 to 2005 was recorded during no fewer than five months. These were April, May, August, September and November, four of which fall within the butterfly transect season. This was balanced by significantly lower rainfall than the average in February, June, October and December. June was the driest month with 64mm of rain and November was the wettest month with 326mm. The wettest day was 10th January with 55mm of rain followed by 45mm on both 19th October and 18th November. The table below shows the monthly rainfall totals and the average maximum and minimum monthly temperatures. The figures in brackets are the average figures at Reraig for the period 1985 to 2005.

	Rainfall mm	Temperature (Celsius)	
		ave max	ave min
January	231 (240)	8.50 (7.84)	1.90 (1.90)
February	118 (190)	8.14 (8.40)	1.79 (1.47)
March	183 (198)	10.68 (10.00)	2.55 (2.49)
April	130 (110)	14.83 (12.24)	4.83 (3.65)
May	183 (98)	16.06 (15.67)	7.24 (5.86)
June	64 (100)	20.33 (17.21)	8.03 (8.03)
July	111 (105)	20.06 (18.56)	10.26 (9.77)
August	276 (140)	19.00 (18.61)	10.23 (9.73)
September	207 (161)	16.63 (16.57)	9.90 (8.01)
October	168 (207)	14.28 (13.38)	5.79 (6.01)
November	326 (214)	10.70 (10.17)	3.60 (3.56)
December	102 (211)	6.17 (8.12)	-0.73 (1.92)
Total	2099mm		

The driest and warmest spell was from 24th June to 5th July when the maximum temperature varied between 23 degrees and 29 degrees. The only significant rainfall during this period was 11mm on 5th July. At the other extreme the

temperature fell below zero on 16 days in December including the last 14 days of the year, the lowest temperature recorded being -6 degrees on 23rd and 24th December. This spell continued into the New Year as we are well aware. Rainfall (at least 1mm) was recorded on 228 days, very close to the average over the last 20 years. Many thanks as usual to Duncan Glen-Riddell for his meticulous recording of the weather at Reraig.

THE WOODCOCK

The Woodcock is a plump wader/game bird closely related to the Snipe family. It is a widespread breeding bird in Britain but better known as a winter visitor when large numbers arrive from northern Europe and Scandinavia. Unlike most waders it is a woodland breeding bird, as its name suggests, but in winter it occurs in a wider variety of habitats. It is principally a nocturnal feeder so is not particularly conspicuous and is mostly seen in car headlights at dusk when it is disturbed from road verges. However in severe weather it finds it necessary to feed during daylight hours and becomes more conspicuous. During the freezing temperatures this December and January it became apparent how numerous the Woodcock is with large numbers reported throughout Lochalsh and Skye including in many gardens. Its distinctive action while probing the ground with its long stout bill against a white covering of frozen snow brought it to the attention of many who would not have noticed it under normal conditions. Its cryptic plumage usually provides it with excellent camouflage. Sadly many birds died as the cold weather continued for longer than usual in our maritime climate and it is to be hoped that a reasonable number survived. Woodcock migrate to the British Isles to escape this kind of weather in their northern breeding range so it is unfortunate that they should get caught out by this exceptional cold spell.

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

Dr John Adamson reports seeing two Sanderling in Balmacara Bay on 27th December and 14 there on 8th January. The Sanderling is a small wader which inhabits sandy shores where it runs along the waters edge at great speed. It is regular in Broadford Bay but is scarce in Lochalsh. On 24th January I saw 3 Turnstones on the saltmarsh above the Clachan Duich Causeway. This was my first sighting of Turnstone at the head of Loch Duich although they are frequent at Ardelve, Nostie and Balmacara Bay. It may be that some waders have been venturing further afield than usual due to the exceptional weather.

It was good to see a pair of Whooper Swans with four young on Loch nan Corr, Inverinate on 22nd November. It was assumed that this was our regular wintering pair which hadn't succeeded in bringing back any young birds from their breeding grounds in Iceland for the four previous years. However I haven't seen the Whooper family since then which is rather a puzzle although there has been a pair of adults on Loch Shiel. If anyone has spotted the family anywhere in the Lochalsh area I would be pleased to hear from them. Dr Adamson was surprised to see 2 Whooper Swans on the sea below his house in Kyle for the first time on 9th December. The swans are usually freshwater birds and as this was well before the inland lochs were frozen this was a surprising sighting.

I have heard of only two sightings of Bramblings this winter. Moira and Adrian Quinn had a male feeding on peanuts on 8th and 10th January in their garden on the shore of Loch Long. The second bird was a female in a garden at Lochcarron. The Brambling is a close relative of the Chaffinch and used to be a regular winter visitor to the area. However it seems to have become much less frequent in recent years so reports of any sightings would be welcome. We had a male Blackcap in our garden on Carr Brae from 27th November until 9th December. It was feeding on seed on the ground along with Chaffinches, Robins and Dunnocks. Reports of any other wintering Blackcaps would also be welcome.

The fieldwork for the new Bird Atlas is now in its third year. Amongst the interesting sightings in the current winter period were a Woodcock at An Dubh-aird (before the main influx) on 21st November, a Grey Wagtail at Loch Lundie on 29th November, 2 Reed Buntings at Attadale on 6th December, a Jack Snipe on the shore at Plockton on 18th January, 4 Crossbills near the Duirinish chalets on 19th January and a Slavonian Grebe and three Skylarks at Drumbuie on 25th January. The Skylarks were exceptionally early retuning to the croft land, especially considering the weather conditions. There were also two sightings of unusual numbers of Woodpigeons. The Woodpigeon is a fairly common bird but numbers are usually quite low in Lochalsh and Skye. So 22 near Braeintra on 11th November and about 60 at Attadale on 6th December were of local interest as was a flock of 75 seen at Armadale Castle on 1st January by Bob McMillan.

It was extraordinary to see molehills erupting practically everywhere through the frozen ground and snow cover during January. The conditions made them more conspicuous than usual. The Mole is widespread in Lochalsh but is not a native of Skye. It was introduced at Lynedale in the north of Skye in 1903 and still only occurs in the northern half of the island (per John Phillips: Garden Wildlife Survey 2003 – Isles of Skye and Raasay).