

PERTSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

NEWS



LETTER

NOVEMBER 1995

Dear Member

After the apparent success of our, largely experimental, first newsletter, I have pleasure in introducing the second. Our early meetings this Session have been interesting and well attended and I trust that the initial difficulties with lighting and amplification have been surmounted. We look forward to the MacAlpine Memorial Lecture on 15 December.

As a tangible memorial to Mr Kenneth MacAlpine, some 20 trees were planted on Moncreiffe Island on 4 November and we were extremely fortunate in having a dry and sunny afternoon for the ceremony. Regrettably Mrs MacAlpine was unable to be present but Donald attended on her behalf and warmly thanked the Society for this token of respect to his father.

To all our members, the Council and I extend the Compliments of the Season.

Dr J F Mair, President, PSNS

Summer Outings – Three Summer Outings were arranged by the Parent Body of the Society. The first in June to the Smith Museum, Stirling, was very poorly attended, only six members being present. The Education Officer, Mrs Elma Lindsay, explained the origins of the Museum and some of the work carried out by her using slides of old Stirling and its environs to help stimulate interest and awaken memories, particularly with infirm and elderly local citizens. Members were conducted through the Art, Textile and Local History exhibitions.

On 30 June 18 members visited Mylnefield and were welcomed by Dr Heilbronn who began the evening by outlining the development of the Institute over the last 70 years. It was explained that, in addition to the work on soft fruit for which it had become famous and a household name, there was now extensive ongoing research and development into a wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops from wheat, barley and oats through to the more exotic species such as coffee, maize and rubber. Much of the work on the crops from abroad provided both the necessary research and development work for the establishment of the crops in their own countries and the provision of research facilities for agronomists and horticulturalists seeking ways to improve the production of food crops abroad. Plant diseases are studied in great depth and members saw a large number of greenhouses where entry was limited to certain scientific staff only, to prevent cross-infection and maintain consistency of treatment. Members also saw greenhouses on rails. These greenhouses could be pulled over trial plots to control the amount of rain they received. The Institute's weather station was inspected – a temperature of 12°C not being particularly high for a June evening!

Unfortunately it was not possible to visit the Old City Chambers as arranged in September but gradual twilight and misty rain gave a suitable atmosphere for members who toured Greyfriars Burial Ground. Having spoken about the early history of the site of Greyfriars Monastery, David Bowler, armed with torch, led the group of about 20 members to some of the more interesting gravestones including the oldest one in the Ground, dated 1580. A large number of the stones show guild and trade incorporation insignia although, sadly, many of the monuments also now show the ravages of time and weather. Indeed, 11 stones have recently been "boxed" to prevent further deterioration.

News Items – Well known local architect, Mr Ken Murdoch, opened our 1995 Session speaking on "Perth Buildings, Doors and Windows" and admirably illustrated his subject with views of doors and windows too often not at ease with, and visually detrimental to, the buildings they serve.

A large audience enjoyed hearing Mr James Aitken speak about "The Flora of the Hebrides" in November. His selection of slides showed not only very fine close-ups of many of the species to be found there but also beautiful views of the meadows, machair and the white sweeping sands of the bays, thus creating for members the atmosphere and the interest of what was obviously his favourite part of Scotland. The talk was especially significant as it was in February 60 years ago that Mr Aitken gave his first lecture to the Society.

Members' Night will be held on 8 March 1996. Any member wishing to give a short presentation of 20 - 25 minutes should contact either the Society or Section Secretary.

Three Parent Body Outings are being arranged for summer 1996 to St Andrews Botanic Gardens, Innerpefferay Library and the Verdant Works, Dundee. Watch for full details on the Museum Notice Board in February 1996.

100 Years Ago - Although our Society was founded in 1867 it was 14 years before it had a permanent "home" with meeting room, library and small museum in South Tay Street. The President, Professor James Geikie, eminent geologist, performed the opening ceremony in 1881. From the beginning, the collecting of specimens had been a vital part of members' activities. The museum area in Tay Street was soon inadequate and an enlargement of the Society's premises was undertaken in 1892 with generous support and financial contributions from members and friends. The new extension was formally opened on 29 November 1895 by Sir William Flower, Director of the British Museum of Natural History in London. As the most up-to-date methods of display, labelling and indexing of the many exhibits were used, the PSNS Museum was one of the best in Scotland at that time. The Museum opened daily except Sunday and every Wednesday evening. The Curator reported 9892 visitors in the first year "giving a daily average of 31.9!"

In Summer 1895 the final excursion had been to Little Glenshee. The report reads - "Strolling through the heather in the neighbourhood of the quarries some members were rather startled at seeing a big adder move swiftly away almost from their feet. A blow from a stick killed the noxious beast but unfortunately the blow was such that the dead animal was rendered useless as a specimen. Two others, however, were afterwards seen, one of which was killed and carried off to the Museum collection." How different are present day attitudes in nature conservation!

Archaeological & Historical Section

Summer Activities - These were well attended on the whole, and additional visits were made to the Excavation of a Roman Watch Tower at Greenloaning in conjunction with members of Dunning Historical Society, and to see the restoration of the old Schoolhouse at Cottown. We finally made the Isle of May, the weather being kind to us this time, and it proved to be a very popular trip, 35 attending, again, including our friends from Dunning. Members also carried out a survey of the older gravestones in St Madoes Churchyard on alternate Wednesday evenings, which was just completed ere the Autumn nights drew in.

Adopt-a-Monument - Stone Circle Trail - Colen, Bandirran and Loanhead - Funding has now been obtained for this project, courtesy of the Mac Robertson Trust and the Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust, and work will now proceed early next year on siting the direction finger posts and printing of a descriptive leaflet. It is hoped to have everything ready for the beginning of the next Summer and to publicise the project in suitable fashion.

Dupplin Cross - The controversy over the re-siting of the Dupplin Cross comes to a head next month with a Public Enquiry to be held in the Station Hotel, Perth, on 12 December. By the time you read this, it may be that matters will have been decided or, at least, have taken another step forward. Hopefully, the decision will be in favour of local groups who wish the Cross to be taken into Forteviot Church and suitably protected there, rather than removed to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. We await the outcome with great interest.

Field Walking – Field walking continues to gain in popularity. Two summer walks were held, one at Leadketty in September, and the other on the site of the Roman Fortress at Carpow on 7 October. At Leadketty a number of Mesolithic flints were found, confirming early human habitation, and at Carpow a piece of a Roman roof tile and fragments of Roman pottery were discovered.

Botanical Section

The Botanical Section's summer field meetings were well attended, as indeed were last season's winter meetings which had an average attendance of 20 people. In the case of field meetings, groups of 8 – 12 people working together are the most successful, so when numbers exceed a dozen, as was the case with about half the meetings, sub-division to smaller groups under group leaders each responsible to the overall leader, allowed us to gain the maximum benefit. This worked well on a number of occasions such as the meeting in June, held to confirm (or otherwise) older records for flora on the Kinnoull Hill area. The less active (or less intrepid) group took on the job of recording plants along the top of the crags while the more energetic and intrepid scrambled about on the steep slopes at the base of the cliffs. The latter group was joined by Dr Keith Bland and one of his students who were on the hunt for insects that might be associated with plants.

A number of meetings, one at Comrie, another above Pitlochry and a third at Braco, had the objective of assisting SWT to survey Wildlife Sites. We much enjoyed the company of SWT conservation group members, some of whom are also Botanical Section members, and it was felt that this was a very worthwhile collaborative exercise which should continue in future sessions. A meeting to the Sidlaw Hills at the beginning of July was especially targeted as an occasion to introduce beginners to plant communities – in this case a species-rich wetland. We were fortunate both as to the weather and the species present and thanks are due to Dave & Morag Scougall for permission to wander across their lovely meadows. In such a good summer it should have gone without saying that field meetings had fine weather but such is the irony of fate, that we had downpours on two of the meetings and steady drizzle for part of a third!

One of the successful ventures was the combining of an afternoon of botanising with a social event in the evening. Towards the end of August a large group collected records from the north-facing slopes above the River Braan near Rumbling Bridge (by kind permission of the owner of Kennacoil House) under the leadership of Neale Taylor and this was followed by an evening barbecue in Neale and Helen's garden near Amulree. Neale also treated the Botanical Section to a wonderful tour of Hokkaido for their first meeting of the winter season.

Ornithological Section

Summer Outings – Our outings were held mainly in May and June, so we didn't benefit from the delightful summer weather. The trip to Insh Marshes was rather spoilt by the bitter cold wind that kept a lot of birds in hiding, but a pleasant walk was had none the less. We were really surprised at the variety of birds and plants on the Inver walk at Dunkeld, and a visit to Fowlsheugh, although a bit wet, gave us excellent views of the seabirds on the cliffs, many of them feeding young. What a variety of wild flowers there – we don't just look at birds! An evening walk up Glenartney and an afternoon wander over the hill from Dunkeld to the Loch of the Lowes completed our expedition, greatly enjoyed by those who took part.

House Marten Survey – This year seven new nesting areas were discovered, thanks to all those who went looking and sent in their reports. It seems to have been a very successful breeding season for the birds, with a grand total of 178 pairs with young found, compared to only 46 reported last year. Known sites had at least 50% more – one even 100% more. We hope all those who helped this year will check the same areas for us in 1996, and that others will be able to help too.

Meeting on 14 February – After hearing Moira Hutchison's talk in October describing her exciting trip to Venezuela, members of other sections might like to hear a talk by Ros Grant about her journey to the west coast of South America. All are cordially invited to join us at what promises to be a very interesting evening.

Welcome to the Photographic Section

Congratulations to Alan Borthwick who recently won the 1995 Scottish Royal Geographical Society Photographer of the Year award with the photograph "Old man in the park". The standard of competition was really high with entries from all over Scotland. As well as the award Alan won an Olympus camera, so he may be able to get rid of some of the old cameras he has lying around the house.

Speakers – Speaker-wise we have visits to come from:

Joan Roy – 6 December, a member of the Dundee Photographic Society, her work is centred around Audio Visuals using all techniques available to her.

Ian Rutherford – 10 January, a photographer with The Scotsman, Ian is a past winner of the British Press Photographer of the Year and is the current Scottish Sports Photographer of the Year.

All members are invited to attend.

Pat Brown – 12 January, a keen mountaineer who takes pictures is how she describes herself. Her pictures, mainly from South America, will take us to sights many of us will only ever dream of seeing.

Donald Stewart – 21 February, President of the Dundee Photographic Society, who specialises in working with monochrome.

Competitions – Most of our competitions are in the later half of the syllabus, however on 11 October we had the first bi-monthly competition on the subject Orange. Winner in the slides was Alan Borthwick, while the prints were won by Jean Burhouse. On 25 October we had the first round of the Main Cup/Grant Cup. Best slide in the Main Cup was "Heron" by David Hay, however Mike Nicoll leads the competition so far with David a close second. Best slide in the Grant Cup was "Red Spire" by Ron Grandison and Ron leads the competition so far. A roll of film was presented to the photographers of best slides. On the same night we had the Peter Rourke Salver for Home Processed prints which was won by James Herd with a print entitled, "Three Chairs and a Nude". James also had the second and third placed prints, while Marion Campbell received Highly Commended for two of her prints. Congratulations to all the winners.

SPF Portfolio – The section had 4 slides accepted into the SPF slide portfolio.

"Winter Hare" by Alistair Stephen

"Poppies" by David Hay

"Sailing in the Mist" by Mike Nicoll

"Silver and Gold" by David Hay

Well done to these photographers, and a special thank you to all who submitted prints and slides for selection to the SPF Portfolios.

Subscriptions – Our Treasurer would like to thank all those who have paid their subscriptions promptly. This has been very helpful. However, there are one or two people who have yet to pay, and it would be helpful administratively if these people could do so as soon as possible should their intention be to rejoin.

Museum News – Members may not be aware of the changes which local government reorganisation will shortly bring to Perth Museum and Art Gallery. After 1 April 1996, the museum will become part of the Arts and Heritage Division of the new Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The other divisions are Libraries and Archives, Outdoor Services, which includes the Countryside Rangers, and Recreation Services, which includes halls and sports provision. The Director of the new department will be Jim Blair who has been Curator of Perth Museum since 1975. The Head of Arts and Heritage will be Mike Taylor who has been Keeper of Natural Sciences since 1978 and Depute Curator since 1989.