

Perthshire Society of Natural Science
Ornithological Section Newsletter
November 2021

We hope this finds you well.

We are aiming to get going again!



A Warm Welcome - A Dunlin to a Sanderling

And especially to PSNS members who have newly expressed an interest in the activities of this group. We hope that we shall be able to meet up and find out what interests you and what the group could be doing to foster this interest. Whether new to looking at birds, or have been doing so for a while, this should be the place to meet (one way or another) to talk about it or to be outside watching.

We shall be thinking of starting up the outings again and I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling happier outside than in the confines of a meeting room. However, car-sharing might be more of a problem. Ideas and views on this and any other topic are invited at the AGM so don't be reluctant to attend as there is a talk as well that you shouldn't miss.

Winter session January to February 2022

We are intending to return to 'live' meetings in the Sandeman Room at the AK Bell Library if at all possible. The room is booked and the speakers arranged. However, we have to keep an eye on the situation and if there is a deterioration we will have to revert to having a meeting by zoom. An announcement before the meeting will keep you up to date.

We anticipate this being a good programme for everyone.

12th January; John Calladine, Senior Research Ecologist, BTO

"Tracking Short-eared Owls"

John tells a fascinating story of where these owls may wander off to, having spent much time and effort to follow their movements by tracking. You'll be amazed. John has a long history of research involving gulls, mountain species, the question of pheasant rearing and release, and more.

9th February; Vicky Turnbull, RSPB Tayside Reserves Warden

"The Tay Reed Beds"

Are they just impenetrable reeds, hiding any view of life on the mud flats beyond, or is there life to be seen? The natural history of a specific environment.

23rd February; AGM, followed by

John Duncan,

"A glimpse of Alaska"

John has been to Alaska a couple of times recently. As a keen ornithologist and photographer this talk will be a look at the state and its wildlife, some of the birds, and its' other fauna.

Obituaries

Euan Cameron

Euan was a member of the Ornithological section for more years than I could remember. In addition to serving the section on the committee he compiled the bird reports and issued a bulletin. He was also the Bird Recorder for Perth and Kinross and served on the Perth and Kinross Records Committee.

An obituary was printed in the September edition of Scottish Birds and I can supply a copy on an individual basis to anyone who requests it. – Jeff Banks

John Wallace

John was a stalwart member of the Ornithological section for a long time, frequently serving on the committee in various capacities. A regular attendee on outings, his interest in birds was extensive. I can remember a long time ago when I was president of the PSNS I could rely on John for help, and that was before I even joined the ornithologists.

A few Tweets

Those Short-eared Owls.

To publicise the talk in January, I should append the photo from South Uist. Unfortunately I never took it! Let me explain. As I related in the last newsletter, I was stravaiging across some low moorland and disturbed a Hooded Crow and the owl. The owl flew directly towards me, only veering off when it had had a good look at me. I had a camera to hand but I was so absorbed in watching the approaching owl that I missed the scoop. I don't think I'm cut out to be a Photographer.



No owl, instead - Another hoodie

Guillemots

John Jessop, our PSNS secretary, phoned me on 31st August to tell me of finding 'more than 20' dead guillemots on the West sands at St Andrews. Unfortunately I'd just left for Orkney and got a message relayed later. On the 11th September, on Shapinsay, having just been watching 650 Black-tailed Godwits, the significant sighting of the day was a single guillemot swimming along the line of a beach, just 2m or so off-shore. And again on the 12th there was a single Guillemot 2m off-shore in Scapa Flow. I thought these incidents a bit odd but not much more. On the 19th I was on the Forth and saw quite a number of guillemots and a few razorbills and started to wonder about why I was seeing so many on in-shore waters. Exchanging notes with John, I caught up with the press releases that were just appearing recording the widespread finding of dead birds on the east coast, as far south as Northumberland. Investigations into the cause appears to be still on-going, I haven't seen a report yet, but the main theories involved toxic algal blooms in the North Sea or increasing sea temperatures leading to sand eels swimming at lower depths, too low for young guillemots, which are still too buoyant, to dive far enough down.



Juvenile Guillemot, Shapinsay

I was surprised to read that they do not disperse widely and may remain in the North Sea, or close to it, throughout the winter.

The importance of sand eels for a number of sea birds has long been appreciated as increasing sea temperatures have forced them further north. The BTO report, *Climate Change and the UK's Birds*, launched at the time of COP26, notes the prediction that the UK's Puffins could decline by as much as 90% by 2050 in a world that warms above 2°C, the decline driven by the reduction in their prey species, the sandeels.

And Twitchers

2 weeks before COP26 there was much press coverage of the sighting of a Varied Thrush on Papa Westray - and the influx of twitchers it created, some, notably, flying from the south of England. Is there a future for Twitching or will it follow egg collecting into obscurity?

On a more upbeat note, I think I noted somewhere my sighting of 7 Little Egrets on the Eden estuary last year. This September I saw 1 on the Tay estuary, as they become more established further and further north.



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