

Dundee Naturalists' Society

Instituted 1874

annual bulletin

1976-77

No 1

DUNDEE NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Annual Bulletin 1976-77

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EDITORIAL

This as you know is our first attempt, as a Society, to publish a Bulletin. It was conceived, with the prime object being, to bring to the notice of the members, the many activities of the society, past, present and future.

This was felt necessary as, in the past few years, a great upsurge of interest in natural history has taken place and that a publication of this nature would help towards a better contact between members.

It is also hoped that the Bulletin would be the medium by which your news and comments can be communicated. So please let me know of any interesting pieces of news or information throughout the coming year, be it the sighting of an unusual animal or plant, or perhaps details of an interesting walk which could be considered for future summer syllabuses.

SUMMER OUTINGS 1976

24 April - Cave Paintings and Iron Age Burial

This, the first outing of the summer season, turned out to be an ideal start as Liz Thoms delighted us when she took us back to the 'Iron Age' with her most graphic accounts of life in these distant times.

The finding of a rare crucifer Wall Rocket Diplotaxis tenuifolia at Lundin Links proved a great boost to our 'Species Recording Scheme' started at this meeting.

8 May - Arbroath-Auchmithie Boat Trip and Cliff Walk

On this outing those of us with 'sea legs' took the boat trip from Arbroath to Auchmithie and were rewarded with fine views of many species of breeding seabirds, including Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars etc.

On the return cliff walk in what has become a feature of our outings, fine weather, many spring flowers were in evidence, with the many species of Lepidoptera ably identified for us by Dr Derek Robertson. Thanks are also due to Mrs Betty McClure and Dr David Shepherd for their invaluable help with plant and bird recognition.

21 - 23 May - Kindrogan Field Centre, Weekend

This was the Society's first weekend outing to be based at a Field Centre with the emphasis on organised education coupled with field work. For the twenty-three members who attended, it proved to be an excellent and challenging experience, with the whole two days, although fully occupied with study and outdoor activities, seeming to fly past with the enthusiastic help and encouragement given by the warden Brian Brookes.

12 June - St Cyrus National Nature Reserve

Sixty-eight members took part in this, one of our most successful excursions, when the warden Mark Avery showed those members interested, the Little Tern ternery at Kinnaber.

Adam Ritchie and Jim Cook were kept busy pointing out and identifying the 150 or so plant species to be found in this 'botanist's paradise'.

Another interesting activity was when a few members put to use some of what was learned at Kindrogan, when, with the expert guidance of Jim Cook, they carried out a transect survey across the different dune formations; the results obtained being made available along with the species list for this outing.

22 June — Scottish Horticultural Research Institute, Mylnefield

This evening meeting took the form of a behind the scenes look at the day to day running of the Institute. The walk round the various sections was preceded by a most informative illustrated lecture outlining the aims and background of Mylnefield by Mr R Exley.

26 June — Glen Doll-Corrie Fee

Corrie Fee has long been famed for its unique montane flora, and with the hope of seeing at least some of the interesting species to be found there, seventy keen naturalists 'headed for the hills' from the car park at Glen Doll. It wasn't long however, before the first speciality was spotted, a very rare Lady's Mantle Alchemilla conjuncta. This species is found here and in only one other site in Britain, that being on the Isle of Arran.

All the way up to the corrie many more plants were seen including Chickweed Wintergreen, Yellow Pimpernel, and two species of Orchid, the Heath Spotted Orchid and the delicate Lesser Twayblade, this latter species remaining hidden under large masses of heather unseen but to the knowledgeable eye of the naturalist.

When the party reached the Corrie proper, they split, with one section led by Adam Ritchie heading to a higher part of the corrie, seeking and finding some rare sedges and the elusive Downy Willow Salix lapponum. The other section led by Brian Allan skirted the base of the cliffs finding such gems as Moss Campion, Starry and Mossy Saxifrages, Holly Fern, Globe Flower, Alpine Meadow Rue and many more examples of typically alpine flora.

For the ornithologically minded Dr Shepherd was on hand to assist in identifying some of the forty-one species of birds recorded that day.

6 July — University of Dundee Botanic Gardens

This great new attraction, although as yet incomplete, proved, as was expected to attract a large turn out of members. This was our second evening meeting. Mr E Kemp enthralled us all with his own attractive turn of speech and obvious enthusiasm born of years of 'living' with plants and trees.

With his fund of knowledge and amusing anecdotes we were shown firstly the large new glass house, then round the extensive and well laid out gardens.

10 July — Keltney Burn and Birks of Aberfeldy

Keltneyburn is a small Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve a few miles east of Aberfeldy. Its main claim to fame is the large number of Orchid species which flower within its relatively small area.

The warden Mr Jim Aitken ably led us through the reserve and the Orchids pointed out included Small White Orchid, Greater Butterfly Orchid, Common Twayblade, Common and Heath Spotted Orchids and Fragrant Orchid.

The orchids were not by any means the only attraction of this area. Some of the more unusual plants spotted during the day were Field Gentian, Gentianella campestris, the strongly aromatic Spignel-Meu, Meum athamanticum, Small Cow-wheat, Melampyrum sylvaticum,

and the ever beautiful Globe Flower Trollius europaeus, and many others.

This, again a very popular outing, had to be divided into two parties alternating between the reserve and the lovely Birks o' Aberfeldy walk.

21 August — Lady Mary's Walk, Crieff

Again the Edinburgh Naturalists' Society joined us on what has become, an annual meeting between our two groups.

The weather, as has become usual, was good to us with a really hot and sunny day.

Jim Cook with his usual enthusiasm and local knowledge, led both groups along the banks of the river Earn which borders the first part of Lady Mary's Walk.

The afternoon part of the outing saw the change in emphasis from Natural History to Archaeology when Miss Betty Bain impressed the gathering with her most graphic account of the lifestyle of the previous inhabitants of the ruined settlement of Glen Lednock.

25 September — Heather Hills Honey Farm and Moorland Walk

This, the last summer outing of the season, characteristically showed the increasing interest built up over the last few years, by providing the largest turn out of members, the numbers topping the eighty mark.

This large turn out was not disappointed, as Mr A Kirkwood explained the technique employed in the 'manufacture' of honey on a large commercial scale.

The visit to the Honey Farm was preceeded by a bracing moorland walk led by Mrs Vi Stott, and after the visit the whole gathering was entertained to tea and sandwiches by the Kirkwood family, which with eighty people present was no mean feat. This kind gesture was greatly appreciated by all present.

WINTER MEETINGS 1976-77

12 October — Butterflies and Moths, Dr Derek Robertson

To start the winter programme we were privileged to have back Dr Robertson, a firm favourite with the Society, to talk to us on one of his many specialist subjects, Butterflies and Moths.

As ever his accompanying slides were breathtaking and as always most informative. Also that evening Mr Hanson had on display a show of local Lepidoptera mounted with their respective food plants

A live specimen of a rare migrant moth was also on display, Convolvulus Hawk Moth found on, of all things, a pair of jeans on a washing line at Forfar.

26 October — Members Night

This took the usual form of slide contributions from a number of members. Organised by Adam Ritchie and introduced by Brian Allan the subjects dealt with were many and varied. They included 'visits' to Lakeland, Spain, America, and even the Sahara Desert, as well as many others closer to home.

The highlight of the evening however, was the amusing collection of candid slides of Society members taken during the past summer outings submitted by Jim Cook.

9 November — Alpine Plants of the Dolomites, Mr Adam B Ritchie

When Adam Ritchie is billed as giving an illustrated talk, the turn out to these meetings always takes a dramatic rise, and this year was no exception. His interesting and informative

talk was complimented with an excellent selection of slides illustrating the Dolomites and their alpine flora.

The only complaint that was heard that night was that it didn't last long enough, which is praise indeed.

23 November — North Atlantic Fish - Sharks to Sea Snails, Dr Dietrich Burkel

Dr Burkel is Deputy Keeper of Natural History at Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow. His hobby and special interest is fish of the Atlantic, and as anyone talking about his or her pastime he showed a natural enthusiasm which was reflected in his presentation.

His illustrations of the Shark and its relatives were most interesting and in parts the screen looked like it was advert for the film 'Jaws'.

7 December — Scottish Alpines and Their Conservation, Dr Rosalind A H Smith

Rosalind Smith well known to society members is the Assistant Regional Officer for the Nature Conservancy Council. Her excellent illustrated talk on conservation of alpine habitats, dealt with a problem which is relevant very much to our own area. Her talk, in fact, was a potted history of our alpine heritage, which we had the privilege to see when we visited Corrie Fee and Glen Doll last summer.

11 January — Wildlife and Wilderness, Miss Valerie M Thom

Miss Thom treated us to a rare glimpse of some of North America's National Parks. She is a superb photographer and works with the Countryside Commission for Scotland. We had the pleasure, as it were, of being transported to such well known parks as The Grand Canyon, The Everglades, Yosemite and many others.

8 February — The Techniques of Wildlife Film-Making, Mr Christopher K Mylne

Our joint meeting with the Scottish Wildlife Trust has always been well attended, but when Chris Mylne was talking the numbers reached near to the two hundred mark, evidence indeed of the high regard we all hold for his work.

As he talked he explained the difficulties, the expense, and the luck that is required when making a wildlife film.

As Mr John Compton, Branch Chairman of the SWT said during his vote of thanks, 'I don't think any one here tonight will look at a wildlife film ever again in the same light'. But none the less we will always now appreciate the hard and often brilliant work of the 'Wildlife Photographer'.

22 February — Mushrooms - Mysteries and Man, Dr Roy Watling

Roy Watling a mycologist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, explained to us some of the mysteries and myths associated with fungi, when he talked to us in his amusing and informative way.

His many travels abroad in search of fungi has made him expert in the identification of mushrooms and toadstools. Whether any of our members would feel quite as confident when reminded of the deadly effects some of our fungi have when eaten, remains to be seen.

Never the less we look forward to next autumn and to our own fungus foray when, stimulated by Dr Watling's talk we explore the woods and fields in search of the many interesting species to be found locally.

8 March — St Kilda - Outpost of the British Isles, Mr I R Macgregor

St Kilda proved to be the ideal subject for our last meeting of the winter programme.

Mr Macgregor detailed in a most interesting way a working holiday he and his wife spent on the island in 1970.

Among the more unusual facts related was the, until now unknown, 'Bonxy Basher', which turned out to be a stick held about the head to ward off the diving Great Skua.

But perhaps Mr Macgregor's most amusing anecdote was his graphic description of the St Kilda islanders favourite meal 'Puffin and Porridge'.

DUNDEE AREA LICHEN SURVEY

James K Cook

This last winter some twenty members of the Society have been surveying the distribution of lichens in and around Dundee. Lichens are small plants found growing on tree trunks and stones and are very interesting to botanists because they aren't actually individual plants at all but consist of a close relationship between two completely different types of plants; ones like cup mushrooms (fungi) and ones like seaweeds (algae). Our interest in them stems from the fact that some lichens are very sensitive to sulphur dioxide air pollution whilst others aren't quite so easily damaged. We hope, therefore, to be able to draw a map of the zones of air pollution in Dundee from the information collected. The surveying itself could hardly be easier. Only six types of lichens are involved and they can easily be learned in one afternoon. As well as learning something about lichens we have found out quite a bit about the distribution of trees and about the identification in winter of the trees themselves and about wildlife in general.

SPECIES RECORDING SHEETS

In April, at the first of our summer outings, it was decided to start a method of recording the species of flora and fauna encountered on our outings. This has been a most successful project with sheets produced for all but the last of our Saturday outings. The benefits of such a scheme are many, the most obvious being that members on the outings are taking much more interest in the wildlife around them. Other benefits are of course a written record of the species found in any particular area is made, the chance of finding a new station for a plant rare in the area, and also the chance to put a name to the plants which in other circumstances would be passed by un-named.

Sheets for all outings are still available and may be obtained from the Editor whose address is on page one. Price 5p. If writing please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

PLANT SPECIES LOCAL IDENTIFICATION KEYS

Some members including myself find difficulty in identifying plants from the normal keys found in the national floras, especially when the family involved is a very large one. It was thought that if a key was produced for the species found only in Angus written in simple terms, this would help in identification of any plant encountered during local walks.

This was attempted with two families, Orchids and Saxifrages and seems on the face of things to have been successful, but of course the proof of the pudding is in the eating and only when used in the field this summer will it be seen if any advantage has ensued.

Copies of these keys can also be had from the Editor at a price of 5p. If writing please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

ANGUS ORCHID SURVEY

Brian Allan

During the last two years a survey has been carried out to establish the distribution of the fifteen species of Orchid which grow in Angus. It is intended to carry this work on for another few years at least.

The success to date has been excellent with new stations being recorded for most of the fifteen species.

The information gained is classified as confidential and is available only to botanists with a genuine dedication to conservation.

Further sightings are required and anyone with such information however small, or even if the Orchid at first cannot be identified, please contact me at my home address as given on page one. Help may also be required in the counting of large numbers of the more common species, so if interested please contact me.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Throughout the last year, informal groups from the Society have been active in all aspects of Natural History. These included Lichen recording, Orchid surveying, or visiting places with an interesting or unusual flora or fauna. There have also been a few informal meetings when tuition was given in Lichen identification, the identification of trees in winter, Fungi identification etc.

The net result is that our Society is not just a series of summer outings and winter lectures but is in fact, in the true meaning of the word 'society', a constantly active group. So why not become involved or suggest new ideas for simplified keys, new projects or outings or ask questions which can only be answered by study in the field.

Most of the Council members are involved one way or another so please contact them if at all interested.