

**SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY** (*Further details of all these and other events will be circulated by email to all members*)

- **Early January 2022 - A New Year's Walk with Anne Gascoigne** (date and venue to be decided nearer the time according to weather and tides)
- **21st January - An Update on the Orkney Native Wildlife Project** (A talk by Zoom) **by Tom Hadley** who will give a background to the ONWP, including the reason behind removing stoats from Orkney and the methods used. There will be an update of results and discussion of how the public can help protect Orkney's native wildlife.
- **Late January - A Beach Walk with Penny Martin** looking at what the winter gales have washed up. We may find and identify seaweed, dead fish, sponges and other marine animals, skate and ray cases, dead seals and birds.
- **February** ( exact date and time to be decided) - **A walk round Brodgar with Mike Gee** to look at the birds and wildlife of the two lochs - Harray and Stenness.
- **26th February - Nature Showcase** (Talks via Zoom). several short talks on different subjects including - John Crossley on Weeds of Cultivation, Alastair Forsyth on the rare *Chrysolina latecincta* Beetle and a film 'The Life of North Ronaldsay's Shells' from James Wilson
- **February/March** (date to be decided according to weather) **Mountain Hares of Hoy in Winter with Jenny Taylor** (A Walk)
- **March/April - Tree Diseases by Steven Hendry of Forest Research** (a talk via Zoom) on his work as a plant pathologist identifying tree diseases in Scotland. Earlier in the year, Steven identified Ash Dieback from samples sent from Orkney.
- **March/April - A Shell of the Past** (A talk via Zoom) **by Holly Young, Archaeologist.** Shell assemblages are a massively under-utilised resource in the archeological record. This talk will cover the various types of information that ancient shells can tell us and how they can be used to inform our understanding of past societies.

*Wishing all our members a  
Happy Christmas and a Wonderful 2022*

# Orkney Field Club

Founded in 1959  
Aim: To encourage the study and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the County.



Orkney Field Club is a Registered Scottish Charity and SCIO No. SC012459

## **Newsletter December 2021**

### **Your Committee**

Our online AGM for 2021 concluded on 25th October and we are pleased to confirm that OFC's new committee is as follows : John Crossley (Chair), Michael Gee (Vice-Chair), Brian Ribbands (Treasurer), Graeme Walker (Secretary), Helen Aiton, Keith Fairclough, Anne Gascoigne, Jamie Moloney, Penny Martin, Jenny Taylor, Megan Taylor and Alexandra Wright. We are now busy making plans for future events.

### **Your Club, Your Ideas**

The new committee would very much welcome your suggestions for walks, talks and other events. So please let us know what you would like included in the Club's programme. We would also love to know which events you have enjoyed the most and why (or even those that haven't seemed to work so well?). Perhaps you have a subject or a local patch and would like to lead a walk or give a talk? We look forward to hearing from you so that we can organise the range of events that you, as members, would like to see included in our programme.

**Please email any feedback, comments or suggestions to our Secretary - [ofcsecretary20@gmail.com](mailto:ofcsecretary20@gmail.com)**

### **Your Records for 2021**

With the blustery weather and short days, now is a great time to collate all your flora and fauna sightings for the year and send them to the relevant recorders. You can find a list of recorders in the 'Records' section of our website, from where you can download recording forms and find information on what details to include. Whether you have hundreds of records, or just a few, they are all important and very welcome.



## Winter thoughts

Graeme Walker

As we reach the end of 2021, we can reflect upon a year when the weather was anything but normal. The Winter of 20/21 wasn't particularly stormy, the Spring was cool and dry, Summer was hot (by our standards!), and Autumn actually lasted longer than 24 hours and had some welcome colour to it. As I write, we've had the first big blow of this Winter and the early December snows have appeared on time, that much at least is usual.

We have now said goodbye to the birds which visit the county to breed in Spring, and those which use Orkney as a pit-stop on their journeys to Southern Europe and Africa. Our Winter visitors have arrived: Redwings and Fieldfares *tseep*-ing and *chack*-ing their way through the shorter days; Long-tailed Ducks and Little Auks adding a frisson of excitement to our coastal walks; and Whooper Swans, Pink-footed Geese and Barnacle Geese grazing in the fields. Around our shores, the Grey Seal pupping season is now on the wane for this year, there are still cetacean sightings being reported, and the Fulmars have returned to the cliffs after their usual brief absence.

These phenological happenings of Nature's calendar are some comfort to us in an uncertain world, we find pleasure in sharing a wildlife moment and mindfulness through sitting and watching the going-on. But we should be aware that this calendar is a finely-tuned, interconnected structure, easily knocked out of whack by a period of unexpected weather, the sudden loss of a foraging site or a safe place to roost. These are the consequences of climate change, habitat loss and uncontrolled development.

The global pandemic has us all wishing for a return to normal, to go back to doing things the usual way, but I think this risks missing the even larger picture of the Anthropocene. If, as a species, we do not get a grip of our overconsumption and live more sustainably, there will no longer be a 'normal'. Can we really countenance an Orkney without the call of the Curlew, without the buzz of the Great Yellow Bumblebee or the loss of the colourful floral carpets on our maritime heaths?

I was impressed by a recent talk in the Orkney Theatre by Doug Allan, the wildlife cameraman. Perhaps you were there too? Yes the photography and filming were stunning, yes, the Polar Bear cubs were cute, and yes, the antics of the penguins were lovely to see. But Doug went further. In a

career spent largely in the Arctic and Antarctic, he has seen first-hand, perhaps more than any of us, the effects of climate change on the wildlife which he and we adore. His message was simple: we have to change our behaviour for the sake of the planet. We can buy less 'stuff', we can recycle more and we can stop throwing plastic into the environment. It isn't a popular message, not least before the festive season, but if not now, then when?

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## Winter ferns

John Crossley

With flowering plants no longer giving more than the odd spot of colour to autumn walks, it's worth keeping an eye out for our few native evergreens. None are common, but they stand out when the rest of the vegetation has died down. Chief among them are ferns. These are mainly small species, at most medium-sized and not nearly as big as the more familiar summer/autumn ones.

The Spleenworts - Sea Spleenwort, Black Spleenwort and Wall-rue - grow in crevices in rock, in natural habitats and on old walls. So does Hart's-tongue but it can also thrive on a well-drained earth bank; it seems to be becoming commoner in towns. Sea Spleenwort, though normally on sea cliffs, occasionally grows in towns too.

The odd one out is Hard Shield-fern, rare, bigger than the others and in more usual ferny habitats, shaded earth banks and the like. However, it recently turned up, uniquely, on a ditch bank in South Ronaldsay – why should it not be elsewhere?

Some of the commoner, non-evergreen, ferns can persist well into the winter in sheltered places but the leaves do not have the tough, leathery quality of the true evergreens.

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## OFC Bulletin : 'The Orkney Naturalist'

We hope you enjoyed reading your 2021 annual bulletin and it won't be too long before the deadline for articles for 2022 is upon us. Please submit articles and reports to John Crossley at [flawsjohn@gmail.com](mailto:flawsjohn@gmail.com) in good time (end of February at the latest, but much sooner if you can). If you are thinking about submitting something or just have an idea please get in touch with John, he will only too happy to discuss.