

Orkney Field Club

Founded in 1959

Aim: To encourage the study and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the County



OFC Newsletter for Spring and Summer 2008

It's incredible to realise that a whole year has passed since the publication of the 2007 Newsletter. Then everyone was full of optimism for the summer ahead. Now perhaps all we should say is "Can this one really be as bad as last year?!"

We owe members a word of explanation about the rationale behind the way we fit events into the OFC calendar. The timing is largely dictated by what species of plant, bird, mammal, insect, etc, are around and at their best at a particular time of year and the date can be critical to within a few days. For example it would be very unusual to find a black darter dragonfly before the 7th July, although soon after that date their flight period commences.

Up until the end of May few flowering plants are in evidence whereas April and early May can be a good time for seeing displaying raptors and waterbirds in their finest breeding plumage. By the end of May most male ducks will have left their breeding sites while the females complete incubation and the rearing of young, and soon after that the males moult into their drab eclipse plumage. Very early June brings out a large number of coastal heath flower species while the rest of June and early July see many other flowering plants at their best. Early August is a good time for heathers and other moorland species. Early July to late August is the optimum time for most dragonflies, butterflies and moths and mid-August for grasshoppers (and midges!). August is a good time for searching rock-pools for marine creatures when the sea temperature is at its maximum. Late September and October are rewarding times for looking at fungi and ferns. Back in May there can be good "falls" of spring bird migrants but these are too unpredictable on Mainland to be worth planning an event for. The autumn "falls", however, are much more predictable and, although varying greatly in extent depending on the weather, usually present some reasonable birdwatching opportunities. Lastly, the conditions of December are ideal for looking for a turkey - roast with all the trimmings!

Don't forget that we value the opinions and wishes of our members as to the nature of our events and the way they are conducted, so please don't hesitate to phone, email or write to any of the committee members with your ideas. Out in the field our more "expert" members will gladly give assistance with identification of species and answer requests for information.

OFC Programme

For trips involving ferries or car-sharing please book with the contact **2 weeks** in advance so that we can work out transport arrangements. For other outdoor meetings phone the contact a few days beforehand. Where possible last minute changes will be notified on Radio Orkney. We suggest that you bring binoculars, notebook, hand lens, packed lunch, weather proof clothing and waterproof footwear, also midge repellent from late June onwards.

Please remember that youngsters under 16 must be accompanied by a parent or close family friend. As usual to promote the mutual study, enjoyment and conservation of wildlife we include the RSPB local Group programme. Both programmes will also be published in the OCEAN calendar which is due out in early April.

April

Fri 18th Club Night

“Happy Island”

Joint event with RSPB Irg. The island off the east coast of China attracts an amazing number of migrant and vagrant birds. Paul Higson describes his visit to the ultimate birdwatchers' paradise.

Sat/Sun 19th/20th

Bag the Bruck

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Please help with the annual ECO-organised beach clean-up, removing litter which can be harmful to wildlife. Taking place at Marwick Bay and Waulkmill any time between 10am and 4pm as you choose. Gloves and bags provided. Contact Brian Ribbands on 751439 (Marwick Bay) and RSPB Office on 850176 (Waulkmill).

Sun 27th

Harrier Sky-dancing

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Watch the spectacular courtship displays of hen harriers and other birds of prey on a guided walk. Older youngsters welcome. Meet at Rendall Hall car park at 9.30am. Book with the RSPB Office on 850176.

May

Sat 3rd

Spring Birds of Shapinsay

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Looking for spring migrants in Balfour Castle woods and water birds in their breeding plumage at the RSPB Mill Dam reserve. Youngsters welcome. Ferry dep Kirkwall at 9.45am and dep Shapinsay on return at 3.15 or 4.45pm. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 11th

Durkadale Picnic

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Planting a shelter belt and doing routine maintenance at the RSPB native tree plantation. Hoping to see some interesting birds. Come any time between 10am and 4pm. Youngsters welcome. Park at OS grid HY293251. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

June

Sun 1st

A Walk to Red Head

By ferry to Eday to enjoy the spectacular scenery, seabirds, raptors and spring wildflowers. This event will be very much a general look at wildlife on a longish walk but the length of the walk can be tailored to suit different levels of fitness. Older youngsters welcome. Ferry dep Kirkwall at 9am, arrs Eday at 1015; on return dep Eday at 5.50 and arrs Kirkwall at 7.05pm. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 15th

The Whitemill Bay Walk

By ferry to Sanday and then by road. On this beautiful circular walk (see Sanday walking guide) we will see birds, seals and abundant wildflowers, as well as gorgeous beaches. Again this will be a general interest walk with tuition as required. Older youngsters welcome. Ferry dep Kirkwall at 9am, arrs Sanday 1045, dep Sanday 5.20 and arrs Kirkwall at 7.05pm. Contact Roger Davies on 721395.

Sun 22nd

Families Wildflower Day Linna Dale, Orphir

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Exploring this lovely flower-rich glen and learning about the plants of the early Orkney summer. We should also see harriers and owls. This will be a slow-paced walk with tuition for all ages. Youngsters welcome. Time 10.30am to 3pm. Meet at the entrance to Linna Dale. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 29th

The Flora of Papa Westray

Taking a close look at plant-rich areas of Papay and trying to relocate some previously recorded rare plants. This trip will involve detailed and often slow-paced examination of plants and habitats; but all are welcome and tuition will be given as required. Travelling via Westray. Ferry dep Kirkwall 9.20am, arrs Papay 11.40; on return dep Papay 5 pm, arrs Kirkwall 7.25pm. Contact John Crossley on 831507.

July

Wed 2nd

Visit to OFC Land at Midland in Orphir

The Club was recently bequeathed 1.5 acres of land in Orphir near the Houton ferry terminal (see item below). The Club must decide how best to manage the land and this will be the opportunity for everyone interested to view the site and have their say. The Club will be carrying out surveys during the course of the summer which members are also welcome to help with. Meet at the ferry car park at 7pm.

Sun 6th

Wildflowers for Beginners

John Crossley will take us to one of the most flower-rich areas of Orkney (the Hill of Dwarmo – HY392252) and explain the basics of plant identification. Meet at Woodwick Gallery/Café car park at 10am. Contact John Crossley on 831507.

Sun 13th

Butterflies and Dragonflies of North Hoy

North Hoy is the best area in Orkney for dragonflies. We will search for insects and other wildlife around Rackwick, Trowie Glen and Sandy Loch. We will be looking in particular for the 4-spot chaser and golden ringed dragonflies. By ferry from Stromness to Moaness; by minibus to Rackwick; on foot to Trowie Glen; by minibus to Sandy Loch, returning to Moaness on foot. Ferry departs Stromness 9.30am. On return departs Moaness at 6.30pm. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 20th to Sat 26th

Stromness Shopping Week

OFC Stromness Shopping Week Nature competition. Look out for The Kids Wild Life competition in The Stromness Shopping Week Programme. Contact: Alison Skene on 850403.

August

Sun 3rd

Families Moth Day

Joint event with RSPB Irg. Moth traps will be set on Saturday night in various “mothy” places. In the morning we will examine the catch with expert tuition. Time and venue to be notified. Contact Sydney Gauld on 872468.

Sun 10th

Coastal Geology of Westray

Geologist, David Leather, conducts a walk along shore-lines of Westray, explaining the geological history, the rock formations and other geological features of the island.

Ferry departs Kirkwall 9.20am, arrives Westray 10.45, departs Westray 6pm and arrives Kirkwall 7.25. Contact Dick Matson 751426.

Sun 17th

Durkadale Working Party

Volunteers requested to help with repairs to the fencing at the OFC native tree plantation in Durkadale. Any time between 10am and 3pm. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 31st

The Living Shore

Marine life experts, Alistair and Christine Skene, show us the marine creatures and sea-weeds of the shore and rock-pools at Birsay on a low spring tide. Meet at the Brough of Birsay car park at 3pm (late start due to tides). Expect to finish at about 5.30pm. Childrens’ fishing nets and plastic containers will be useful. Rocks will be slippery so bring suitable footwear. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

September

Fri 19th

Club Night

Speaker and subject to be notified.

Sun 21st

“Hot-spots” for Autumn Migrants

A look at favourite spots on Mainland Orkney for autumn migrants. Hoping to see warblers, flycatchers, redstarts and other passage species. There is always the chance of some unusual birds turning up. Last time OFC held a “migrant” day we had yellow-browed warbler, reed warbler and red-breasted flycatcher! Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

October

Sun 5th

Berriedale Picnic

Our annual autumn visit to Britain's most northerly native woodland on Hoy for autumn colours, bird migrants and a chance to learn the basics of fern and fungi identification. By ferry from Stromness to Moaness, then walking in to Berriedale via Sandy Loch, returning by the same route. There will be the option of going to Rackwick by minibus and walking from there. Contact Jenny Taylor on 851322.

Fri 17th Club Night

Speaker and subject to be notified.

RSPB Local Group Programme

April

Fri 18th April RSPB Spring Meeting (see OFC programme)

Sat/Sun 19th/20th April Bag the Bruck (see OFC programme)

Sun 27th April Harrier Sky-dancing (see OFC programme)

May

Sat 3rd May Spring Birds of Shapinsay (see OFC programme)

Sun 11th May Durkadale Picnic (see OFC programme)

June

Sat 14th June The Birds of Rousay. A walk on Rousay to see moorland birds such as harriers, merlins and red-throated divers and birds of the cliffs and shore. Contact Anne Bignall on 870576.

Sun 22 June Families Wildflower Day. (see OFC programme)

July

Sun 6th July A Walk to Wastlee Moor. By ferry to Hoy, by road from Lyness to Melsetter, then on foot to Wastlee Moor. Looking for birds of moorland, cliff and seashore. Option to continue to the Berry – strenuous! Contact Pauline Wilson on 741382.

August

Sun 3rd August Families Moth Day (see OFC programme)

Thurs 7th August West Mainland Agricultural Show. As last year the RSPB will have a stand at the Dounby Show. Help from Local Group members any time between 10am and 4pm would be much appreciated. Volunteers please call the RSPB Office on 850176.

Sat 9th August County Show. RSPB members are also requested to give up an hour of their time to help with the RSPB stand at the County Show any time between 10am and 4pm. Again please call the Office on 850176.

September

Sun 28th September Autumn Migrants of Sanday. Sanday is a superb island for autumn migrants, so we are going back yet again. Always the chance of a real rarity. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Club Nights

The Kirkwall Community Centre will not be open on Friday nights, when we start our new season in September.

The centre will be open on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights. If you have a preference which night we hold our Club Night please let me know by e-mail:- dennis.paice@btinternet.com or by ordinary mail to:- Dennis Paice, Ardleigh, Dounby, Orkney, KW17 2JA

Some Recent Records

The fine weather over much of the period of the autumn migration meant that not many birds ended up off course in Orkney and as a result few passerine migrants over-wintered. Numbers of fieldfares, redwings and bramblings have been well below normal. A notable exception has been the siskin which had its biggest autumn passage through Orkney for many years and now we are seeing a steady trickle through the County moving back northwards.

A fine male bullfinch has been in the vicinity of Finstown for some weeks and a flock of goldfinches has appeared regularly in the same area.

A grey phalarope was a nice Christmas present for Deerness folk when it took up residence near the slip at Newark Bay on Christmas Eve and stayed for a couple of months. Phalaropes are swimming waders and spin their bodies to stir up the water and bring food items to the surface. They are also very approachable so that watchers had superb views of this elegant bird employing its unusual feeding technique.

A handsome drake smew found at the Loch of Skaill on 12th Nov 07, although somewhat elusive, has stayed the winter. This could be the same bird that wintered there 2 years ago.

A very pale juvenile rough-legged buzzard turned up at St Peter's Pool, Deerness, in early November. After several days it disappeared and not long after a similarly pale juvenile was seen in the Rendall hills. Presumably the same bird, it has stayed in Rendall until the present time. Many local birdwatchers have been able to get great views of this superb raptor.

The star winter visitors were 2 common cranes which were discovered near Finstown on 5th Jan. Their arrival coincided with that of another 14 cranes in north-east Scotland. Although the mainland Scotland birds stayed for a few weeks (some perhaps until now) the Orkney cranes were not seen again after the 5th. What is notable is that this is the only mid-winter visit to Orkney of this species ever recorded.

As usual at this time of year cetacean records are nearly all of strandings. Thus on 5th Jan there was the carcass of a fin whale found at Newark Bay; a minke whale stranded at Grobust on Westray. Scapa was the scene of two harbour porpoise strandings, a freshly dead adult on 23rd Jan and a juvenile on 8th March.

On a brighter note a member had a close view from his car of a young otter at the Brig of Brodgar at about 9am on 6th March. The otter was about to cross the road from the Loch of Stenness to the Loch of Harray but was startled by the approaching car and did a quick about turn back into Stenness.

Adult rough-legged buzzard



Newsletter

Anyone willing to receive their Newsletter in future by e-mail (four or six A4 single-sided sheets) will you please send your e-mail address to dennis.paice@btinternet.com

Bequest to OFC of Land in Orphir

Mr Thomas Wilson and his wife lived at Midland Cottage overlooking the Bay of Houton for 10 years after his retirement in 1986. Mr Wilson had started his teaching career at Lyness on Hoy and had then moved to southern Scotland where he taught at a number of schools progressing to the post of headmaster. He had a life-long interest in gardening and enjoyed the peace and tranquillity of the countryside. Sadly Mr Wilson died in 1996 but very graciously he bequeathed the area of land next to Midland Cottage to the Field Club to be managed as a wildlife haven. Mrs Wilson found the property too much to manage on her own and moved to Kirkwall. Recently she instructed solicitors to expedite the transfer of the land to OFC and the process has just been completed.

The land which abuts on to the main road consists largely of a beautiful area of pristine heather and, next to the road, a large patch of coarse grasses and some trees and shrubs. To repay the debt we owe to Mr Wilson and to honour his memory we must now decide how best to manage the land for wildlife.

Membership

All membership subscriptions are due on the 1st January 2008. Adult £10, Family £15, OAP/Unwaged £6, Student £3.

Anyone who has not renewed their membership will not receive any more publications.

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Photograph Your Finds

John Crossley

Many of us have digital cameras and already use them to photograph what we see out and about in the countryside. Here's an idea to add to the interest and enjoyment of this activity: - photograph anything that you find interesting but don't recognize - plant, beetle, moth or whatever - and see if one of the resident experts can identify it.

One way to do this would be to have a special session, a Club Night, probably in winter, where these images could be shown, shared and anyone could have their say. This would be fun and could kick off some interesting topics and discussions.

Another way would be to send the images to the relevant County Recorder - though first you would have to check their willingness to receive them - bear in mind that not everyone has Broadband.

Another approach would be to do a little project, focusing say on a particular group of species or various species associated with a particular habitat or site, and show photos of these. The Committee is now proposing that the Club acquire a digital projector, one aim being to broaden the scope and appeal of our activities with this kind of event.