

world of sea-weed covered boulders and was unable to see the green bank-top vegetation from which it had emerged. It could however see across to the vegetation on my shore. Without hesitation it plunged into the water and swam straight as an arrow at considerable speed across the 60 yards of water and without stopping to shake the water from its fur, shot up the bank and disappeared into the vegetation.

I had been in the presence of one of Nature's most vicious and efficient killers, but nevertheless it had been an awesome few moments

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### **Swallows**

**Anne Gascoigne**

I stay nearly half a mile down a track and have several old buildings which make an ideal home for swallows which nest here every year. This year I have had 3 early nesters and one pair then immediately set about bringing up a second brood (which should fledge before the end of August).

During car journeys to and fro I have noticed that I am very often followed by "my" swallows. They swoop behind and alongside the vehicle and seem to be gathering flies which the car disturbs from track-side vegetation. There is a mix of umbellifers and long grass, dockans and thistles which no doubt provides damp habitat for a variety of flies. On the way home I usually see them hunting over my field then some come to tag along behind the car again. The swallows lose interest (or need a rest) when they get to the public road.

I wonder if this is a coincidence, or an actual example of learned/adapted behaviour? Or whether the birds are simply seeing me off the premises!!

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### **Bulletins and Contact Details**

By now you should have received your copy of the OFC 2014 bulletin and we hope you enjoy the variety of articles it contains. If, by any chance, you haven't received yours, then get in touch and we'll get one to you straight away. We would like to ensure that we have our members' contact details correct, so please remember to contact us if you have moved or changed your email address. It is very helpful to have email addresses for everyone, where possible, so that we can get information on spontaneous events to our membership and also save on substantial postage costs.

# **Orkney Field Club**

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

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## **Newsletter September 2014**

It's good to be able to say what a wonderful summer it has been and the fine, warm weather has certainly added to the pleasure of exploring the Orkney countryside and viewing our fascinating flora and fauna in delightfully benign conditions. This year we have made use of the long summer days to run some evening events which have proved very popular and we will undoubtedly repeat that next year. Meantime, we hope you find plenty to enjoy in our autumn and winter programme.

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### **It's Fungi Season ...**

**Julian Branscombe**

Although there are always some fungi in evidence throughout the year, autumn is when the Fungal Kingdom comes into its own, with fungal fruit bodies sprouting from dead wood, or bursting up from the grass, well, like mushrooms!

Orkney has a great range of fungi. We have a few on dead wood - like the large and short-lived brackets of Dryad's Saddle on sycamore trunks. Many more species occur on leaf litter and the rotting remains of other plants, or dung heaps or well-manured grassland. Wood Blewit is one of the prettier species with this lifestyle.

Other fungi form intimate 'mycorrhizal' relationships with certain tree species. Look out for milkcaps, brittlegills, The Deceiver, Fly Agaric and other species of fungi found where their microscopically-thin underground threads (called hyphae) can plug into the roots of their tree and shrub partners. The fungus gladly accepts sugars from the plant in return for supplying water and nutrients gathered from the immense web of hyphae which run through the soil.

Orkney is also vitally important for the fungi of unfertilised grassland, be that old lawns and cemeteries, or unimproved pastures, dune grassland or cliff top. A host of pinkgills, waxcaps, club fungi and earthtongues can be found in such spots. The old cemetery at Finstown is one of the best places for them in the county, as well as being one of the more accessible. You may

find the beautiful Pink Waxcap here, or the off-white clumps of Smoky Spindles.

I am always keen to hear from people about what fungi they are finding. Records can be emailed to me at [julian.branscombe@rspb.org.uk](mailto:julian.branscombe@rspb.org.uk).

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### **OFC Programme - September 2014 to March 2015**

We look forward to seeing you at our walks and talks. For more information, get in touch with the named contact, or just come along on the day. For outdoor events, please bring warm, waterproof clothing and footwear and a picnic if its a full day event. Talks are normally held in St Magnus Centre unless otherwise stated and start at 7.30 pm We make a small charge of £1 for members and £2 for non-members, Last minute changes or additions to the programme will be notified on Radio Orkney, or on the OFC website and by email, More details on the walks and talks can be found on the website.

#### **September 28th (Sunday) Berriedale Picnic (booking essential)**

Our annual walk to this wonderful native woodland on Hoy. Some rough walking involved. Numbers limited due to minibus capacity. Boat fare and small charge for minibus. Contact Jenny Taylor on 850514 - [jenny@jtlarch.co.uk](mailto:jenny@jtlarch.co.uk)

#### **October 1st (Wednesday) : Marine Animal Strandings**

A talk by Dr Andrew Brownlow of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme about why strandings occur. Fiona Read will also introduce the work of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation group.

**Please note : This talk will be upstairs in The Girnel, Kirkwall**

#### **October 18th (Saturday) : Natural History at Stromness Museum.**

Meet at the museum at 2 pm for an introduction to the museum and its natural history collections from its president, Kathleen Ireland. We hope to forge stronger links with the museum (The Orkney Natural History Society)

#### **November 28th (Friday) : Wildlife on the Wrecks of Scapa Flow**

A talk by Dr Joanne Porter of Herriot Watt University on the many species that have made their homes on the wrecks in the Flow and the conservation value of these sites

**Jan 3rd, 4th or 5th New Year Ramble** (weather dependent) We venture out after the holidays to enjoy landscapes and wildlife. Venue to be decided

nearer the time. Contact Penny Martin on 761168 - [physiopenny@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:physiopenny@hotmail.co.uk)

#### **January 16th (Friday) : Two talks in one night - Feral Cats and the U3A**

Dave Musson outlines the effect that feral cats have on our wildlife and the work being done to limit the population of Orkneys Feral cat population. Tim Wright will tell us about the U3A and the local groups, several of which are involved in natural history study.

#### **February 20th (Friday) : Iceland: Wildlife in the Land of Fire and Ice**

Orcadian Wildlife's Steve Sankey will take us on a tour of Iceland's volcanos and glaciers as he summarises the exciting wildlife of this spectacular geologist's paradise.

#### **March 13th (Friday) : OFC Annual General Meeting and Microscope Event**

Come along to the AGM, join in the discussions, share suggestions for events and maybe even join the committee. Then try out some different sorts of microscopes and take a look at some wildlife up close.

#### **RSPB Local Group Events**

Please phone the contact names to book onto these events.

##### **Sun 14th Sept. Bird Migrants Mystery Tour**

To book contact Grace Currie on 872742.

##### **Sun 21st Sept (reserve 28th Sept) - To Sanday for Autumn Migrants**

Weather dependent. Contact: Julie Rickards on 861328.

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#### **A Stoat Encounter**

**Dick Matson**

On the bright windy afternoon of 23rd August I was walking down the west shore of the tidal "river" which joins Stenness Loch to the sea. This area is known as "the Bush" although there is no tall vegetation for miles! As I went I watched the hurrying flocks of Redshank, Turnstone and Knot and the Red-breasted Mergansers diving for under-water prey at the "river" entrance. All was peace and tranquillity, but suddenly some 80 yards downstream on the east shore appeared a small mammal which hurried hither and thither occasionally rearing up on its hind legs. The long body, short legs, sandy brown coat and extensive white bib and its size indicated that it could only be an adult stoat - the mammal conservationists had been dreading would thrive on Orkney's fauna after its mindless introduction a few years ago.

At this time the tide was at low ebb and the animal found itself in an alien