

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 No.SCO12459

OFC Autumn and Early Winter 2012 Newsletter

Another disappointing summer draws to a close - disappointing not only for the adverse effect that cold and wet weather has on wildlife but also in the way it has limited our opportunities of getting out into the countryside to observe it. Some of our committee had hoped to organize short-notice events for members on an opportunity basis to look at plants, insects, etc, but the weather defeated us every time. Let us hope that the weather this autumn treats us more kindly. We trust that in our programme below there will be something of interest for all of you.

Some of you have signed up to the new Orkney Nature Forum kindly set up by Dave Wakefield in association with OFC. This Forum allows users to post and obtain up-to-date news of wildlife sightings, to request assistance with identification by posting photos and to find out about forthcoming wildlife (including OFC) events and other news. We hope you will join the forum if you have not already done so. The link is: <http://orkneynature.proboards.com/>

The committee does its best to keep members up to date as regards news and forthcoming events by means of the Newsletter, the new forum, the OFC website and by email; but we recognise that some folk don't use email or have computers and we don't want them to be disadvantaged. So if this is the case with you please let the secretary know (on 751426), giving your particular area(s) of interest (wildflowers, birds, insects, mammals, etc,) and we will phone you should any particularly exciting wildlife event occur or if a field trip is being arranged at short notice.

OFC Autumn and Early Winter Programme 2012

Our Club Nights, unless otherwise indicated, are held in the St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall, starting at 7.30pm. Non members are welcome to attend. The entry fee is £1 for members and £2 for non-members which goes towards the cost of advertising and room and equipment hire. Under-19s are welcome and are admitted free.

If you would like to attend any of our outdoor meetings please phone or email the named contact a few days before or, if the event involves a ferry journey or shared transport, then a week or so before. Please bring warm waterproof clothing and footwear and some refreshment (and midge repellent!).

Last minute changes to the programme will, if possible, be notified on Radio Orkney, by phone, on the Orkney Nature Forum, on the OFC website and by email (if we have your email address).

If you need transport to an event please inform the contact or the secretary and we will try to arrange a lift for you.

September

Salmonberry Eradication. (Date and time to be announced) A follow-up session to deliver a second blow to the invasive salmonberry in the Club's Thomas Wilson plot in Orphir. Please contact Jenny Taylor on 811231 for instructions.

Sat 15th or Sun 16th. Identifying Migrants. We will visit hot-spots on Mainland Orkney learning how to identify autumn bird migrants. We will choose the day with the better forecast but if both days look unsuitable we will try again on Sat 29th or Sun 30th Sept. Meet at the car-park opposite Tesco's at 9.30am. Contact: Dick Matson on 751426.

Fri 28th. Club Night. The Orkney Hen Harrier Story. In an illustrated talk Eric Meek gives a brief history of Hen Harrier studies in Orkney, culminating in the findings of Arjun Amar's PhD study and the subsequent investigations and discovery of what caused the decline of the mid 1990s.

October

Sun 7th. Berriedale Picnic. By passenger ferry from Stromness to Moaness. On to Rackwick by minibus and then on foot into Berriedale and back to Moaness via Sandy Loch. We hope to see lots of interesting fungi, migrant birds and other wildlife as well as gorgeous autumn colours. Book with Dick Matson on 751426.

Wed 10th to Fri 12th. Identifying Fungi. Fungal forays on each day, followed by evening workshops in Kirkwall using microscopes. The event will be run by national expert Liz Holden, organised by Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme in association with Orkney Field Club and the Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre.

Booking essential – to book please email julian.branscombe@orkney.gov.uk or ring 01856 852037, but please note that Julian is now only in the office part-time, and it may take a couple of days for messages on the answer-phone to be responded to.

Fri 19th. Club Night. Telling the Environment with Seaweeds. Dr Martin Wilkinson of Herriot-Watt University explains what seaweeds are and what we can learn from looking at the make-up of seaweed communities on the seashore. While these are influenced by natural factors such as wave action they can also indicate what man-made stresses can do.

Sat 20th. All day in and around Stromness. **Special Seaweed Identification Workshop** run by Martin Wilkinson organized by Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme in association with Orkney Field Club and the Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre.

Booking essential – to book please contact Julian Branscombe as above.

November

11th. Seal Watch South Ronaldsay. By car to Windwick, S Ronaldsay, (sharing transport) to discreetly watch grey seal pups. We also hope to see bulls competing for females. Meet at 9.45am at the car-park opposite Tesco's. Time permitting those who wish can come on to one or two birdwatching spots in S Ron. Bring extra warm clothing, refreshment and something waterproof to sit on while we watch. Book with Dick Matson on 751426.

Fri 30th. Club Night. From Falconry to Farming. Exploring human-animal relationships in the last 10,000 years through the archaeo-zoological record. An illustrated talk by Prof Keith Dobney of the Department of Archaeology, Aberdeen University.

(The OFC "Christmas" Dinner will be held on 1st February 2013.)

Lichen Events

Roger Davies is leader of the OFC Lichen Group and will be organising lichen outings this autumn. If interested please phone Roger on 721395 or email him at roger@headweb.co.uk. Roger is also very happy to help with lichen identification.

RSPB Local Group Programme

Sun 9th Sept. To Stronsay for Autumn Migrants. By ferry to Stronsay to look for migrant warblers, flycatchers, redstarts, waders and more. Book with Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 23rd Sept. Autumn Migrants of Sanday. Again a ferry trip to look for migrating warblers, flycatchers, etc. Also on Sanday the lochs attract a host of interesting waterbirds. Book with Grace Currie on 872742.

Fri 5th/Sat 6th Oct. Bag-Packing at Tesco's. A chance to raise much-needed funds for the RSPB's conservation work. Volunteers willing to help are kindly asked to contact Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Thurs 8th Nov. RSPB Local Group AGM and Talk. After brief AGM business **Rory Crawford**, RSPB Seabird Policy Officer, will give a talk on **Scotland's Seabirds – a Mystery Wrapped in Contradiction**. He tells us how important Scotland is for seabirds, the history of their treatment by the human race, the ground-breaking research currently being undertaken and the conservation measures which urgently need to be implemented.

The AGM will start at 7.30pm and the talk at 8.15pm. Venue: the St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall.

Orkney RSPB Wildlife Explorers Programme

Orkney WEX is aimed at children aged 8-12. Younger children are welcome as long as a responsible adult stays with them. Unless otherwise stated all meetings are charged at £1.50 for RSPB members and £2 for non-members.

Contact: Jane Beckwith on 01856-841212 or Kate Thomson on 01856-851835

Or email: orkneyrspbwildlifeexplorers@hotmail.com

Sun 16th Sept. Rock-pooling Event at the Broch of Birsay. Go on, get your hands in the water and see how many spectacular sea creatures we can find.

Meet: Brough of Birsay car-park. Time: 3-5pm

Sun 7th Oct. Beach Art. Together we will create art from shells and nature. Try your hand at felting and clay work. Meet: Rendall Hall. Time: 2-4pm

Sun 18th Nov. Seal Pup Watch. Meet: Venue in South Ronaldsay to be confirmed.

Time: 1-3pm

Sun 9th Dec. WEX "Wildabout Christmas" Party! Join us for making Christmas crafts and celebrate Christmas with us. Meet: Indoor venue in Kirkwall to be confirmed. Time: 2-4pm

Scottish Ornithologists Club Programme

Thurs 4th Oct. The BTO Bird Atlas 2007 to 2011 Final Update. Bob Swann, Scottish Organiser for the BTO Bird Atlas Project, will describe the findings of this huge project which gives us an accurate up-to-date picture of the state of the country's bird populations. Bob will highlight the significant changes and trends. St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall, at 7.30pm.

Thurs 8th Nov. Scotland's Seabirds – a Mystery Wrapped in Contradiction. Please see the RSPB LG programme above.

Photo Competition

In association with the Orkney Camera Club the RSPB Local Group is running a photographic competition under the title "*Wild Orkney: the Way I See It*". The competition is open to Orkney residents and visitors of all ages and photos should focus on one of the following categories:

Wild Open Spaces

Wonderful Colours of Orkney

Waves and Water

Wondrous Nature in Detail

The competition runs from now until the 31th March 2013. Entries should be dropped off at “Visit Orkney”, the Travel Centre, West Castle Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, or posted (clearly labelled “Photographic Competition”) to RSPB, 12-14 North End Road, Stromness, Orkney, KW16 3AG. Visit www.cameraclub for further information and to download an entry form.

Please Send in Your Wildlife Records

It is very important that as many people as possible should contribute their wildlife records to the Orkney Biodiversity Record Centre database (OBRC). By consulting the database, developers are able to minimise the adverse impact their projects might have on the County’s wildlife habitat.

Please send your records to the appropriate County Recorder (who collates them at the end of each year and forwards them to the OBRC) or send them direct to the OBRC yourself. Full details of how and what to record and the contact details of the Recorders are included in the back pages of the Club Bulletin (the Orkney Naturalist).

While it is of value to post your sightings on The Orkney Nature Forum or on Orkbird (and we hope you continue to do so) neither the Club nor the OBRC have the resources to trawl through these to extract and validate records.

Alien Mammals

Until recently all the signs were that the introduced population of **Stoats** in Orkney was in terminal decline. There had been no Stoat sightings for several months and none had been caught during the trapping programme set up by SNH.

Recently however there have been a number of sightings in the Wideford Burn / Airport area and unexplained disappearances of poultry in South Ronaldsay.

Thus it is essential that all sightings or poultry losses are reported to either SNH on 875302 or the RSPB on 850176 or to the Club secretary on 751426.

Now for a real shocker! - A visitor to North Hoy who has a wide knowledge of the wildlife of the North of Scotland reported seeing a **Pine Marten** near Moaness at grid ref: HY 236038 on 21st August. It is difficult to disbelieve a report from someone of his experience (Pine Martens and Stoats are common on estates where he has worked as a part-time gamekeeper) but equally difficult to comprehend how this animal could have got to Hoy. Attractive animals though they are, Pine Martens are even more efficient killers than stoats. They employ their tree-climbing skills to prey on Red Squirrels and the eggs and young of tree-nesting birds (including Ospreys) and are obviously a grave threat to ground-nesting birds and other mammals. They can even climb the harling of exterior walls to take eggs and young from House Martin nests. So, please, if you are foot-loose in North Hoy, keep your eyes open and report any sightings!

Rare Bumblebee Steals Cake!

Field Club members met as usual in the spring (25th March) to carry out maintenance work on the OFC and RSPB native tree plantations in Durkadale and to have our traditional picnic. As so often happens, the weather was kind to us and both the work and the picnic were great fun. As we settled down to enjoy our goodies our kind chairman, Penny, produced a rather delectable walnut cake and proceeded to offer it to the hungry workers. The secretary gratefully accepted a portion and was duly admiring it and savouring its fragrance. However, by now the weather was mild enough for some insects to be on the wing and with a loud buzz a bumblebee hove into view. Admittedly there was only the odd primrose in flower but this bumblebee had non-floral intentions and made a bee-line for the secretary’s cake to which it tucked in voraciously. Mild persuasion failed to deter it and there was no choice but to let it satisfy its appetite. It was all in a good cause, however, because this was no ordinary bee, but a Great Yellow Bumblebee queen, a nationally rare species, Orkney being one of the last strongholds of this insect.