

# North-East Scotland Branch Newsletter

September 2014

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Welcome to the newsletter of your local SOC branch. With the winter season nearly upon us again, we thought it was time to issue another local newsletter to all our members. It's been an excellent year for the branch, with the highly successful Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference back in March an undoubted highlight (not that we can claim all the credit!) – I hope those of you who attended enjoyed it as much as we did. Another notable date in the calendar was the branch's field trip to the Isle of May. Hopefully there'll be more outings to follow, and the account below will inspire more of you to come along.

Coming along to our meetings or other events is obviously as good a way of keeping up to date with branch news as any, but don't forget about our page on the SOC website (<http://www.the-soc.org.uk/whats-on/local-branches-2/grampian/>). We'll also continue to send out email updates about branch news and events, so please do let me know (at [grampian.secretary AT the-soc.org.uk](mailto:grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk)) if we still don't have your correct (or preferred) address. Have a good autumn.

Hugh Addlesee, Branch Secretary

## Upcoming talks

With the start of the branch's winter talks programme just a few weeks' away, here are a few more details to tempt you along, whether you're a regular attendee, a first-timer or somewhere in between. Meetings are held at The Sportsman's Club, 11 Queen's Rd, Aberdeen, AB15 4YL at 7.30 pm. To cover the hire of the room a small donation is requested - £2 for members and £3 for non-members.

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October** – Social evening - a light hearted look at the life of a wildlife guide by Steve Willis followed by a quiz

Whilst Steve is well known in the region for his work on saving Red Squirrels, he has also spent a couple of years as a wildlife guide around Scotland and further afield. What promises to be an entertaining insight into life in the driving seat on tours will be followed by a quiz being put together by our very own Jenny Lennon. Jenny's aiming to provide a few tricky ID challenges, as well as looking for some local knowledge. There might even be some non-bird questions!

**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November** – Drennan Watson - The whins, the Roden and the birdies

Drennan is a local land-use expert with particular knowledge of the Cairngorms. He offered the following prelude to his talk: *"Sizeable areas of agricultural land are actually being abandoned or semi-abandoned in the north-east. What then happens? Often, whins (gorse) invade these areas. This leads to a succession of events in which birds and the wind play key roles and the result is new habitats, new woodlands of different kinds. But the process is not as simple as it seems at first. Something in the behaviour of birds influences it profoundly. But what this behaviour is and what causes it are obscure. Can members of SOC supply the answers?"*.

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December** – Chris McGuigan – Nightjar colonisation of Angus followed by a local contribution by Alan Knox

Chris is an avid birder and ringer based in Montrose. With his sights set on species moving up from the south, he was perhaps not as surprised as many of us would have been to hear the song of a Nightjar in Angus in July 2011. However, the apparent pace of colonisation is certainly a surprise. Chris will bring us up to speed with events in Angus, while Alan will summarise the situation in our region, where birds were also found this year. Don't expect site details, as the species is vulnerable to disturbance, but there should be some top tips to help you find your own and help document the expansion.

## Branch Excursion to the Isle of May

On 18 May this year, eight of us left Aberdeen for a day trip to the Isle of May. For some it was a first-time visit. And, yes, we did car-share. As it was an afternoon sailing, a leisurely mid-morning start was all that was required and we arrived at Anstruther harbour in good time for lunch and ice cream before the scheduled departure. Being a warm dry Sunday, the boat, the *May Princess*, was full to capacity (100 persons) and it was T-shirt weather all the way to the island. Sailing time was about 50 minutes across a calm sea, with the seabird activity steadily increasing as we neared the May. First a few Puffins and the occasional Guillemot on the sea, interspersed by passing Gannets travelling to and from the Bass Rock clearly visible to the south. Then the aerial activity picked up as we sailed round past the high cliffs on the south side of the island. The boat slowed for us to admire the hundreds of Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and gulls milling around, on the sea, and entering and leaving their nest sites on the narrow ledges. The landing jetty is up a small rocky inlet on the east side and we

were greeted by hundreds of Arctic Terns as we came in. They had only recently arrived and were yet to establish their nest sites, so lots of pairing up and squabbling going on. A quick briefing from the resident wardens and then up to the new visitor centre with its information about the island, its history, and the research work being undertaken. Day trippers get about two and half hours on the island to wander at will over the well-marked paths - plenty of time to walk up to the top of the cliffs and view the seabird colonies and take lots of pictures, and then up past the prominent Stevenson Light on the top of the hill, and down to the other side of the island, the Low Light area or the northern limit of the permitted path. It is not permitted to leave the paths because of the damage it might cause to the hundreds of Puffin burrows all over the slopes, as well as the nesting Eiders scattered around - they are everywhere! It was not just the birds either, but butterflies and colourful pink Thrift and white Sea Campion-covered slopes. The only downer on the day was the scarcity of migrants - Wheatears, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and a single Whinchat being about all that was on the island at the time, no doubt due to the fine weather. (It got better over the next few days, unfortunately for us!)

With time up all too soon, it was back to the *Princess* or get left behind overnight. We were back in Anstruther by 7pm, timely for a fish supper at the award-winning Anstruther Fish Bar, and then the drive home.

A few photos from the trip (credits to Jenny Lennon, Alisdair Weston and myself):





Ideas for future trips include joint excursions with other local groups, with a themed content and local expertise on hand, or another goose-watch at Loch of Skene or Strathbeg, or ringing demonstrations. There are other locally-organised trips too, like those out of Buckie and Banff this spring to see the assembly of White-billed Divers off Portsoy, and the pelagic from Macduff last autumn, all of which have been well-supported. If more of these trips can be arranged for next year, we will be happy to lend our wholehearted support to the organisers.

However, none of these ideas will come to fruition unless we hear of some interest - so, if you are at all interested, speak up! Contact myself or any one of the branch committee.

*John Wills*

### **The Atlas Fund - a reminder**

As a result of the publication of our local atlas, "The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland" in 2011, we have a sum of money that is currently surplus. While we're not looking to spend it in a hurry (some, for instance, may be used to support a future atlas), the editors (Ian Francis and Martin Cook) along with the North-East Scotland Branch Committee have decided that money can be made available to support birds and ornithology in the region. For the purposes of the fund, this region comprises of Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, in accordance with the published atlas. In order to ensure transparent distribution of any of the money, the following rules have been drawn up:

- Applicants must be able to demonstrate that their project will benefit ornithology in North-east Scotland (including Moray).
- Grants are available only for amateur projects.
- Applicants are expected to be existing members of, or to join, the SOC.
- Where applicable, it is expected that recipients will disseminate the results of their project to local birdwatchers. This may be by a talk to the local SOC branch(es) or through publication in the North-east Scotland or Moray Bird Reports, or Scottish Birds.
- Any publications relating to the project results should state that a contribution towards costs was received from The North-East Scotland Atlas Fund.
- The fund is administered by the North-East Scotland SOC Committee or by an alternative committee or subcommittee that they entrust with this role. Awards are entirely at the discretion of the awarding body.
- Applicants must state whether or not they have applied for, or intend to apply for or have received, grant aid from other sources.
- Where appropriate, applicants are expected to have applied for an SOC Research Grant and to be aware of other funding sources.
- The grant must be used for the purpose stated in the application unless otherwise approved in writing by the awarding body. The grant must be returned to the awarding body if it is not used by the recipient as agreed by the awarding body.

Applications may be made at any time by writing to the Secretary of the North-East Scotland SOC Branch (*grampian.secretary AT the-soc.org.uk*).



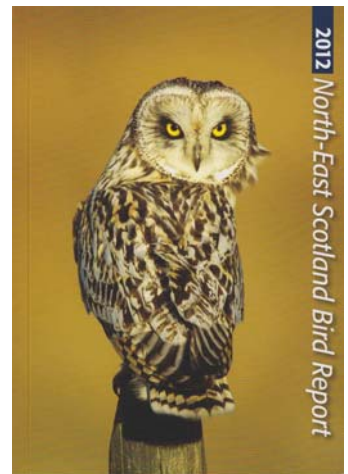
## The North-East Scotland Bird Report

I'm sure that many of you already get and support your local bird report. In the case of North-East Scotland, the latest edition is for 2012, with the 2013 report currently in production.

The 160 pages of the 2012 report contain an account of all 250 species recorded in the region during the year, all the way from the commonest to separate articles detailing each of the four additions to the regional list. There's also an account of the activities of the Grampian Ringing Group, and articles about the influxes of Iceland and Kumlien's gulls, and of Bean and White-fronted Geese to the region. The cover features a stunning photo of a Short-eared Owl, while colour pages inside include images of other notable birds recorded during the year.

If you are not on the mailing list for the report, and would like to be, or would like to receive just the 2012 report, please contact Dave Gill, Quarmby, Nethermuir Road, Maud, Peterhead AB42 4ND (david AT gilldavid1.orangehome.co.uk). The 2012 report costs £9 including postage.

*Hugh Adlesee*



## Contact details

Details for the current North-East Scotland Branch Committee are given below. At the AGM in April we welcomed two new committee members: Eric Meek and Danny Heptinstall.

John, Hugh, Jenny, Alan and Brian will be in their third year of their respective posts. A three-year term is the norm for the SOC, with the option to serve for another three years. So next year they will be obliged to seek re-election or step down.

**We welcome nominations or suggestions for new members of the committee at any time.**

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