

North-East Scotland Branch Newsletter

September 2013



Welcome to the newsletter of your local SOC branch. With some significant changes affecting the branch, and some exciting events coming up, we thought it was time to issue a local newsletter to all our members. While we don't anticipate this being a regular occurrence, please do contact me if you have anything you would like to include in a future edition, or with any other comments. Other ways to keep up to date with branch news are through our page on the SOC website (<http://www.the-soc.org.uk/whats-on/local-branches-2/grampian/>), which we hope to be adding to soon, and by email. If you'd like to receive email updates about branch news and events, it would be great to have your email address. While we do have many members' addresses, there are about fifty for whom we don't. If you think that we might not have your correct (or preferred) address, please send an email to me at grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk. I hope to see you at a branch event soon.

Hugh Addlesee, Branch Secretary

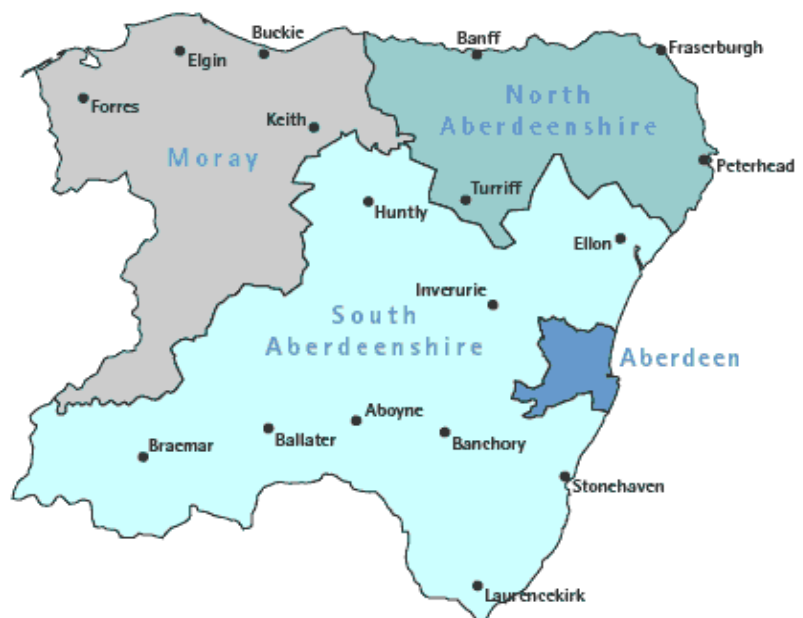
A new name for the local branch

At the Annual General Meeting in April this year, the local SOC branch name officially changed from 'Grampian' to 'North-East Scotland', disposing of an unloved and inappropriate name and clearing the way for new SOC developments in Moray (see below).

The local group was founded in 1947, and for nearly 30 years it was called the Aberdeen Branch. As a result of local government reorganisation in 1975, the SOC eventually introduced branch names that in the main followed those of the local authorities: in 1987/88 our branch became 'Grampian', in line with the geographically misleading Grampian Region (which took in the historical shires of Kincardine, Aberdeen (with the city), Banff, Moray and Nairn). The inefficient two-tier local authority structure of Regions and Districts was swept away after another nine years and the 'new' Aberdeenshire came into being in 1996. This structure removed Nairn, Moray and part of Banff from the old Grampian into a new Morayshire, creating far more sensible geographic regions.

The name 'Grampian' was always unpopular and it was not adopted widely by organisations outside the local authority arena. Ornithologically, only the Grampian Ringing Group adopted it. The local bird report (since 1974), annual reports by the British Birds Rarities Committee and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, Scottish Bird Report online, Raptor Study Group (slightly different boundaries), NESBREc, two local atlases, Ian Phillips' *Rare and Scarce Birds* and other groups and publications have all favoured 'North-East Scotland'. With this in mind, members in attendance at the AGM voted without dissent that the time had come to bring the branch name in line with general usage. With the formation of a new branch in Moray, our formal boundaries will in future coincide with those of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.

Alan Knox



The North-East Scotland Branch will now cover Aberdeenshire (North and South) and Aberdeen city, while Moray will have its own branch.

...and a new SOC branch for Moray

SOC membership in Moray has increased considerably in recent years, and new birders have moved into the area, many of whom are not yet Club members. In order to attend SOC branch meetings, our members are faced with a return journey of close to 100 miles to travel to Aberdeen or Inverness. For this reason we have decided to form a new branch of the SOC in Moray.

The new branch will be called 'Moray Bird Club – the Moray branch of the SOC'. A committee has been formed and a programme of meetings arranged. The first meeting will be held at 7.30pm on October 10th 2013 in Elgin Museum hall. In early September, all Moray SOC members will receive a mailing from SOC headquarters to give more detail about the arrangements for the new branch. All interested birders will also receive information by e-mail, and details will appear shortly on the Moray & Nairn birding website at www.birdsinmorayandnairn.org.

We hope that the new branch will provide an opportunity for those who share a common interest in birds to meet for a regular social occasion. We shall usually have a speaker and the emphasis will be on local birds and birding – with plenty of time to get to know those whose names we may recognise but faces we do not! We look forward to seeing you in October.

Martin Cook, Secretary, Moray Bird Club – the Moray branch of the SOC, martin.cook99@btinternet.com

Just as Martin and his fellow committee members will, we're sure, also welcome along any SOC members from outwith Moray who find it easier to attend meetings in Elgin than in Aberdeen, the North-East Scotland Branch will continue to welcome any Moray members who wish to attend our meetings or events. We look forward to working with the Moray branch to further the interests of birds and birders in the area as a whole.

North-East Scotland Branch Committee

Upcoming talks

With the start of the North-East Scotland Branch's winter talks programme rapidly approaching, here are a few more details to tempt you along, whether you're a regular attendee, a first-timer or somewhere in between. With the exception of the October talk, meetings are held at The Sportsman's Club, 11 Queen's Rd, Aberdeen, AB15 4YL at 7.30 pm.

Tuesday 8th October – for the first meeting of the season we're trying something different, with a joint meeting with the RSPB local group in Aberdeen as we co-host the 'Urban Birder', David Lindo. This should be a fascinating evening, as David talks about his life of urban birding and offers ideas to get us all making the most of our lunch breaks or trips to the city. Please note the charge for this will be £2.50 for SOC members (and £5.00 for non-members), and that the talk is on a Tuesday at the University of Aberdeen's Zoology Building on Tillydrone Avenue.

Monday 4th November – Aberdeen University has an increasing number of ornithology students and we welcome two current PhD students to speak about their work. Sarah Hoy is studying Tawny Owls and Goshawks in Kielder forest and Hannah Grist will speak about her work on the wintering distribution of Shags on the east coast, many originating from the Isle of May.

Monday 2nd December – Local ornithologist Rab Rae ('Skitts') will speak on his work in northern Norway on Jack Snipe, which he has studied for many years. This will include how modern technology is helping to unravel some of their secrets. Rab is a regular speaker at the branch and a former committee member.

Jenny Lennon

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 22nd March 2014

We are delighted to inform you that the 2014 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference will be held in Aberdeen, co-hosted by the North-East Scotland Branch. The date is Saturday 22nd March and it will be a whole day affair, to be held within the premises of the University of Aberdeen. A full day of talks will be presented in one of the large, tiered lecture theatres, with additional attractions, book sales and catering in an adjacent open space - further details about the exact location will be announced in due course. There will also be optional field excursions to local birding sites such as the Ythan Estuary, Loch of Strathbeg and Peterhead/ Fraserburgh on the Sunday for those delegates wishing to make a weekend of their visit; familiar sites to us all to be sure, but local birders will be welcome to come along and accompany our visiting guests.

The conference is an annual event, with the SOC and BTO alternating in taking the lead to arrange the day's programme. Next year it will be the BTO's turn and we will be working with them in developing the programme, organising and leading the local field excursions, and hosting at the venue. The theme of the programme will be along the lines of 'bird-human interactions' (or 'Birds and People' for a more catchy title, plagiarising the title of a recent publication by a well-known author) and there will certainly be local contributors in the programme of first-class speakers. There will also be opportunities to visit the King's Museum located in Old Aberdeen and also the new University library, both of which have open exhibits.

The lecture theatre should have a capacity of over 200, which is about the size of the spring conference in past years, but we're hoping that you'll all attend and it'll be a sell-out!

John Wills

Field Excursions

In days of yore, the branch used to organise day excursions to local birding hotspots and other interesting areas in the region, and they used to be very well attended by birders of all levels of experience and ability and their families alike. That's how I learnt of many of the local birding sites when I first came to Aberdeen. However, attendances fell away with time, maybe the result of over-familiarity, increased mobility of the young, ageing (!), people increasingly doing their own thing, whatever. Eventually we were obliged to stop offering them, although we still asked for any interest at the annual branch AGMs but without much being expressed. Except for a couple of overseas trips, there hasn't been a branch excursion since the late '90s.

New committee, new ideas, new enthusiasm, and we are tempted to try again. Last November we started low-key with an early morning goose watch at Loch of Skene which was only lightly attended, hopefully more as a result of the cold, early start (7am!) and limited advertising. Maybe there's not much of an appetite for a lot of geese taking off into dawn's early light. However, the watches at Loch of Strathbeg seem to be well attended, and the local RSPB local group have led two such excursions to Loch of Skene, albeit meets at both venues have been in the afternoon to dusk when there is perhaps more to see. Perhaps that is the way forward, and we should explore the possibilities of joint excursions with other local groups, with a themed content and local expertise on hand. These could include the aforementioned goose-watches, or waterfowl concentrations like on Skene or Strathbeg, ringing demonstrations, etc. Or we could try something a bit more ambitious which requires a bit more organisation and is less likely to be undertaken by the less-adventurous birdwatcher on their own, like a day trip to the Isle of May NNR off the Fife coast in early summer, or to the Eden Estuary/ Fife coast. A 40-minute boat trip to the May, with 2-3 hours to explore the island, departing from Anstruther costs £24 per person/£20 concessions/£12 child, but a group discount may be negotiable, and car-sharing could be organised to get folk down there.

There may be other locally-organised trips too, like those organized from Buckie this spring to see the assembly of White-billed Divers off Portsoy, and the forthcoming pelagics from Macduff in September, 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, and do it soon for things to happen in 2014. *John Wills*

The Atlas Fund

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@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 2011, with the 2012 report currently in production.

The 144 pages of the 2011 report contain an account of all 247 species recorded in the region during the year, all the way from the commonest to a first for Britain (White-winged Scoter). There are also separate articles detailing each of the six additions to the regional list, an account of activities of the Grampian Ringing Group, and an article about Constant Effort Site ringing. The cover features a stunning photo of the Sandhill Crane at Strathbeg, while colour pages inside include images of a wide range of other species 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 2011 report, please contact Dave Gill, Drakemyre Croft, Cairnorrie, Methlick, Aberdeenshire AB41 7JN (david@gilldavid1.orangehome.co.uk). The 2011 report costs £9 including postage.

Hugh Adlesee

Contact details

Details for the current North-East Scotland Branch Committee are given below. **We would welcome nominations or suggestions for new members of the committee at any time.**

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