

Orkney Field Club

Founded in 1959

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



Scottish Charity No: SC012459

OFC Newsletter for Autumn and Winter 2008

The summer of 2008 will have benefited most forms of wildlife although wader breeding may have suffered because of the dry spring. Certainly the frequent spells of fine weather have done much to lift the human spirit. But as a sinister background to all this there has been an almost total failure of many of our seabird species to breed yet again this year. The balance of our marine ecological system is in disarray and no-one seems to know what the implications are for the fauna dependent on the plankton at the bottom of the food chain. The least that anyone who cares for the environment can do is to actively support the introduction of the marine conservation measures now under discussion.

OFC Programme

For the outdoor events please book with the named contact a week beforehand. We suggest you bring binoculars, notebook, hand-lens, packed lunch, weatherproof clothing and waterproof footwear. Midge repellent may be necessary for the Berriedale trip. Youngsters are welcome but under-16s must be accompanied by a responsible adult. The OCEAN calendar (the programme of all the autumn events being run by environmental groups) will be published in the Orcadian newspaper at the end of September. Last minute changes to the OFC programme will be notified on Radio Orkney where possible. Please note that indoor events are now held in **the St Magnus Centre**.

September

Fri 19th. Club Night. Paradise? - The Seychelles. Alistair Skene gives an illustrated talk on the wildlife and other bits and pieces from the only oceanic granitic islands in the world. St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall at 7.30 pm.

Sun 21st. Mainland Migrant Day. Visiting "hot-spots" on Mainland at the height of the autumn bird migration. We should see warblers, flycatchers, waders and plenty more. Meet at the car-park next to the Kirkwall lorry-park (opposite Tesco's) at 9.15 am. We will car share as far as possible. Contact: Dick Matson 751426

October

Sun 5th. Berriedale Picnic. Our annual visit to Britain's most northerly woodland. As well as enjoying the autumn colours and looking for bird migrants there will be instruction on the basics of fern and fungi identification. Ferry departs from Stromness at 9.30 am and from Moaness at 4.30 pm on return. Some of the walking is moderate to difficult. Contact: Dick Matson 751426.

Fri 17th. Club Night. The Flying Dustbin - a Fulmar's Tale. This film compiled and shown by Raymond Bessant tells the remarkable success story of the northern fulmar in the 20th century. But now in the 21st, as the film reveals, marine pollution and climate change pose a real threat to this enigmatic seabird even in the wildest parts of Scotland and a team of dedicated scientists are investigating these potentially disastrous developments. St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall at 7.30 pm.

November

Sat 8th. Charities Bazaar. As usual the Field Club will have a stall at this fund-raising event with a variety of goods for sale and a bumper hamper to raffle. (Volunteers to assist requested). Donations of goods for sale (plants, trees, home-bakes, books, videos, jig-saws and other saleable items) welcomed. Also contributions of items for the hamper gratefully accepted. Kirkwall Community Centre 10 am to 3 pm. Contact: David Peppitt 841813.

Fri 14th. Club Night. Ben Lawers and Its Alpine Flowers. In an illustrated talk Eric Meek describes the plants of the most celebrated of the mountain flower sites of Scotland. St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall at 7.30 pm.

Sun 16th. OFC Autumn Ramble. A bracing walk looking at the wildlife of the Orkney autumn. Venue depends on the weather and conditions underfoot. Could be Birsay cliffs, Mull Head, Rousay Any other suggestions? Contact: Dick Matson 751426.

December

Fri 5th. OFC Christmas Social. This year we will be celebrating with a buffet supper at the West End Hotel, Main Street, Kirkwall. Meet at 7.30 for 8 pm. Cost: approx £15 per head. Vegetarian food included. If interested please contact Dick Matson on 751426 by 21st November.

County Recorders

It has become evident that the contact details for some recorders as published in the 2008 OFC Bulletin are out of date or incorrect. We would ask members to please look at the list of Recorders in the Bulletin and if they know of any contact details in need of updating inform the Editor, David Peppitt, on 841813.

Dale, Costa, Bird Crop and Garden

In the autumn and winter the bird crop and surrounding trees at Dale can attract good numbers of finches, buntings and other small birds, while harriers pay frequent visits and more occasionally merlins and sparrowhawks. At migration time warblers and occasionally flycatchers can be seen. OFC and RSPB local group members are most welcome to pay a visit. There is a fairly basic hide, and also birds can often be viewed at close range from the house. Please give Dick a ring on 751426 if you would like to come and see what's about. Regular updates of the Dale bird population will be posted on the Orkbird website - orkbird@yahoogroups.com

RSPB Local Group Programme

Sun 28th Sep. Sanday Migrants. In recent years the Group's visit to Sanday for autumn migrants has been so rewarding that it has become an annual event. Ferry departs Kirkwall 9.00 am, arrives Sanday 10.45, departs Sanday 5.20 pm and arrives Kirkwall 7.05. Contact Dick Matson 751426.

Sat 25th Oct. RSPB Feed the Birds Day. Get practical advice on feeding your garden birds, making bird mixtures and finding out which species you might attract. By kind permission of Wellpark Garden Centre at whose premises the event will be held. Helpers needed. Volunteers please contact Morag Wilson (RSPB office) on 850176 or Dick Matson on 751426.

Thurs 6th Nov. RSPB local group AGM and SOC Talk. After the brief AGM business there will be a joint meeting with the SOC at which Norman Elkins will give a talk on "Climate Change and Wildlife". St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall at 7.30 pm. All welcome.

Newsletter

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

Scottish Ornithologists Club Programme

Thurs 9th Oct. Birding in Africa. An illustrated talk by Ron Forrester. Non-members welcome. St Magnus Centre 7.30 pm. Admission free but contributions towards room hire would be appreciated.

Thurs 6th Nov. Climate Change and Wildlife. See above.

Salmonberry Alert

Many people are aware that Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*) is an invasive plant, but its march forward in Orkney seems to be progressing at a faster and faster rate. In recent years it invaded the entire wood at Trumland House on Rousay, smothering out all other understory and ground flora plants and the owners have a serious struggle to control it. The RSPB/OFC has had several working sessions to try to eradicate this invasive species from attractive natural habitats in Ussdale with some success (though it is likely that extreme vigilance will be needed to stop it spreading there again).

Most recently it has been discovered growing throughout entire, large willow carr near Bridgend (along the Old Finstown Road). Sadly will be very difficult to find any method of saving this carr, which is an important part of our native woodland resources.

Without a doubt, this plant is a severe threat to all our natural vegetation and also to our much-valued planted woodland. It appears to be spreading both vegetatively and by seed. Salmonberry is a classic example of how something introduced quite innocently, and with the best intentions, can turn into a 'monster'.

With this in mind, can I put in a plea? For Field Club members to keep an eye open for the plant, to send sightings of it to me at enny@jtlarch.co.uk, so that it can be tackled before it starts to spread in sensitive areas in the devastating way it has in the above mentioned sites. The main affected areas on Mainland Orkney seem to be centred around Stenness and Finstown ... but of course you may know something different!!!

Some Recent Records

Undoubtedly it has been the exceptional passage of bird migrants and vagrants through Orkney which has captured the imagination of wildlife watchers during late spring and early summer. Some of the arrivals could be explained by the abnormally long spell of winds from the south and south-east and others by food shortage in their local range.

Here are some of the more unusual records: May started with the appearance of 2 **avocets** at the Mill Dam of Rango with 2 also sighted on N. Ronaldsay on 20th. A total of 5 **common cranes** were seen in the islands during the month, while a very rare **black stork** appeared over Evie and Rendall and some of the isles between 21st and 24th May. Single **Temminck's stints** were located at the L. of Tankerness and on N. Ronaldsay on 21st. Immaculate summer plumage male **rustic buntings** were reported from Stronsay, St Margarets Hope and Burwick between 18th and 30th (possibly involving the same bird). An even rarer **collared flycatcher** was in N. Ronaldsay on 24th, while on 30th and 31st **nightjars** were seen or heard in Toab, Firth, Binscarth and on N. Ronaldsay.

June was determined not to be outdone by May and started off splendidly with a **golden eagle** over Finstown on 2nd with a second over Holm on 8th while a **sea eagle** was over Woodwick Valley, Evie on 6th. A **waxwing** was reported from N. Ronaldsay on 11th followed by 4 at Graemshall, Holm on 12th and another singleton from Evie on 19th. A superb female **red-necked phalarope** delighted observers at the L. of Skail on 21st. From mid-June until well into August there was an extraordinary influx of **rose-coloured starlings** to the north of Scotland, most being seen in Orkney and Shetland. These birds were many hundreds of miles north-west of their normal range. The star bird of the month was the very rare **river warbler** which was detected in bushes beside a burn in Evie, staying from 8th to 18th June. Through the kindness of the landowners many local

birdwatchers and a good number from south were able to see this bird and hear its characteristic and unusual song.

July got off to a good start with an adult **white-billed diver** in fine summer plumage settling in Water Sound for a long stay, giving observers fine views anywhere between Burray and St Margarets Hope. Earlier in the summer a trickle of **common crossbills** had signalled the start of a major irruption of this species from their breeding grounds in Russia and NE Scandinavia. As sometimes happens with a major crossbill irruption some individuals of the much rarer **two-barred crossbill** joined the party, the first being seen in Orkney on 20th July followed by at least 5 more, while as many as 40 arrived in Shetland. An OFC member in Rendall who keeps his peanut feeder well topped up was rewarded with visits from several common crossbills over a period of several weeks and for a short period from one two-barred crossbill. At the end of July the sighting of adult and newly fledged young **garganey** on N. Ronaldsay strongly suggested that the birds had bred there. The month rounded off nicely with the appearance of **European bee-eater** over Stromness.

In early August singles of the rare **citrine wagtail** turned up in Stenness and on N. Ronaldsay, while later in the month **wood sandpipers** were spotted at the L. of Skaill, the Mill Dam of Rango, in Firth, at the Mill Dam on Shapinsay and on N. Ronaldsay. Normally seen in Orkney on only one or two occasions each year at least 4 of these elegant waders were involved. A **greenish warbler** was seen on Stronsay on 17th and another on N. Ronaldsay the following day. The 3rd **bee-eater** of the Orkney summer was seen on Shapinsay on 31st and again on 1st September (the time of writing).



There were mixed fortunes for insects this summer. A poor breeding season in the cold, wet weather of 2007 meant that few locally-bred or migrant butterflies were on the wing in 2008. However several specimens of the beautifully-marked and uncommon-to-Orkney species, the **peacock**, turned up in various places.

Moths fared a lot better than butterflies and for the OFC/RSPB Moth Day on 3rd August the weather was kind and large numbers were caught in the traps. Over the County as a whole in 2008



at least 6 **convulvulus hawkmoths** and one **death's head hawkmoth** were recorded, as well as a **canary-shouldered thorn**, a new species for Orkney.

Over the last 10 or so years OFC has frequently included a dragonfly and butterfly day in its summer programme. Without fail the weather has been cold or wet or both! until 2008. (Some members will remember having to spend the greater part of one outing sheltering in the RSPB poly-tunnel at Moaness waiting for the ferry back to Stromness!) This year we went to Hoy on 13th July with the main aim of locating the **four-spot chaser** dragonfly which, although common in mainland

UK, is restricted in Orkney to a small area near Rackwick and only proved to have bred on 2 small pools. While not exactly hot, the weather was mild and dry and many of the commoner dragons, damsels and butterflies were on the wing. At our first port of call, the pools near the Rackwick car-park, we were delighted to spot a four-spot chaser zooming around at high speed, probably chasing insects. It has long been suspected that these pools are a breeding site for the species and although this sighting lends weight to the theory positive proof is still needed. At pools further up the valley 2 more specimens were seen so that, although we were unable to record proof of breeding, we did confirm that the species was surviving and perhaps thriving. During the day we also recorded: **common hawker dragonflies; large red, common blue and blue-tailed damsels; large heath, common blue and small tortoiseshell butterflies; and meadow grasshoppers.**

There was considerable interest among our botanist members in the discovery of a vigorous specimen of **sea-kale** growing on a beach in S. Ronaldsay, the first record of this species for Orkney. In fact this plant has seldom, if ever, been recorded in the north of Scotland.

