



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2010

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
22 March 2010

GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:

<http://www.gnhs.org.uk/>

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS AND AGM

Mary Child

February

Tuesday 9th

6.30pm **Tutorial:** Solitary Bees: Cathy Fiedler

7.30pm **Lecture:** Scottish plants at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh:
Heather McHaffie. 7.30pm

Tuesday 23rd

7.00pm **AGM**

7.45pm **Lecture** Great crested newts in Scotland, and the Gartcosh translocation:
Debbie McNeill.

March

Tuesday 9th

6.30pm **Tutorial:** Orthoptera – grasshoppers and their allies: Jeanne Robinson.

7.30pm **Members' Photographic Night:** Your slides or digital slide shows
Contact David Palmar

April

Tuesday 13th

6.30pm **Tutorial:** The Glasgow Living Water Project: Eilidh Spence.

7.30pm **Lecture:** Red Squirrels: Mel Tonkin.
(jointly with Hamilton NHS and Paisley NHS)

May

Tuesday 11th

7.30pm **Lecture:** Clyde River Trust: Willie Yeomans. 7.30pm

June

Tuesday 8th

Summer Social: details in spring Newsletter

Christmas Dinner

Roger Downie

The GNHS festive season got off to an excellent start with our Dinner at Café Connect in Cathedral Street - well attended, with good food and two entertaining talks on marine turtles to follow. Thanks to Janet Palmar for finding the venue and doing the arrangements. A great improvement on the Graham Kerr, I thought. It is likely that the venue will be repeated for 2010.

Firstly thank you very much for supporting last year's Excursion Programme, which I think was successful. We covered quite a range of interest and I hope that there was something for everyone.

Now we are in the New Year, plans for this year's Programme are beginning to take shape. While I am asking the Conveners and Leaders for their suggestions for this year, this would be a good time to raise any ideas you may have - whether they take place always depends on practicalities, availability of leaders, etc., but I'm open to your thoughts! Similarly if you have any comments on the way excursions are run, please let me have them so they can be taken into account for the future.

Following issues raised by members last year, the following points should help to clarify the procedures to be followed:

1 Attendance on an Excursion

In order that Leaders have an idea of numbers attending, and to avoid confusion on the day. Please notify the Leader in advance that you are attending an excursion. If you have to cancel please notify the Leader. If you have to cancel on the day, please call the Leader's mobile (or tell someone else attending the excursion).

2 Cost of Excursions

Where an excursion involves a cost (e.g. transport, fee to third party etc.), a booking form will be issued with the Excursion Programme. A place will only be guaranteed when the full payment is received with the booking form.

If you have to cancel your attendance on an excursion, please notify the Excursion Organiser (Anne Orchardson) and/or the Leader as soon as possible, and at least 1 week in advance so that a replacement can be found. You should also help to find a replacement yourself.

In the event of no replacement being found, you will forfeit your payment. If you cancel at short notice, or do not attend, you will forfeit your payment (unless you have arranged for someone to attend in your place).

In the depths of winter, it's nice to start thinking about the possibilities for the more clement months (hopefully!) I look forward to hearing from you.

Pat Palmar 1920-2009

Roger Downie and David Palmar

We are sorry to have to report that Pat Palmar, a GNHS member for many years, died on November 28th 2009 after a short illness. She was not only the Newsletter Editor's stepmother and wife of well-known former GNHS member Charles Palmar, who was formerly the Curator of Natural History at the Art Gallery and Museum in Kelvingrove, but lived a most interesting life including taking notes at war trials in Vienna, and being one of 5 people who founded the Greater Glasgow Health Board in 1948.

EXCURSION REPORTS

Tollcross Park, 21st May 2009

Bob Gray

As a place to observe a number of really unusual trees Tollcross Park is hard to beat, outside of the Botanic Gardens, for their ease of viewing and their closeness to each other. It is a gem of a park that deserves to be more visited.

The west side of the park consists of drumlins of boulder clay till, sediment deposited by the retreating ice, perhaps some 14k years ago. These drumlins form part of Glasgow's drumlin swarm. The east side consists of a 100' raised beach containing sands and gravels. In 1897 the city purchased the land with its 18th Century mansion house, which was opened in 1903 as a children's museum complete with a cock robin exhibit. This was last heard of located in the Forge shopping mall near Parkhead cross. The house is now a home for elderly folk.

Being c.83 acres in area the park is too large to walk around in its entirety and see all its trees in an evening and so we followed a shorter route that allowed us to view most of the rare and unusual trees. Nine of us enjoyed a sunlit evening as we walked up the imposing lime avenue from the main Tollcross Road gate towards the mansion house. Our attention was drawn to the fabulous display that constitutes the International Rose Trials judged here annually. Graeme Golding of GCC explained that growers submit new varieties that are assessed for disease resistance, growth habit, scent and colour before prizes are awarded for the best. He also showed us a horse chestnut infected with the bleeding canker disease, *Pseudomonas syringae* pv *aesculi*. The bacteria weaken the tree by growing through the cambium so that under the bark becomes hollow and bleeding ensues. This allows the invasion of fungal pathogens. In front of the house, a red horse chestnut (*Aesculus x carnea* 'Plantierensis') and two hybrid cockspur thorns (*Crataegus x lavalleyi* 'Carrierei') were seen. Between the house and the 'Winter Gardens' glasshouses is a row of conifers that includes a Hiba (*Thujaopsis dolobrata*) and some Sawara (*Chamaecyparis pisifera*) and variegated cypresses ('Lutea'). On the lawn here are located three weeping ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula') with, in front of the glasshouses, two single-leaved ash (*F. excelsior* f. *diversifolia*) and the unusual 'Imperialis', feathery-leaved alder (*Alnus glutinosa* 'Imperialis').

Moving clockwise behind the glasshouses leads to a grassy walk at the north end of which are a fine pair of silver pendent limes (*Tilia* 'Petiolaris') and a number of broad-leaved limes (*T. platyphyllos*). Just east of here is a low-growing, old tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Moving from this short avenue towards the glen we came across what is arguably one of the rarest trees in the country, an Afghan ash (*F. xanthoxyloides* aff. var. *dumosa*). It is essentially a shrub but it has been grafted onto a root stock at about three metres so that it has a somewhat unprepossessing appearance. The surrounding shade is not helping its growth. Its existence here is recorded (courtesy of Richard Weddle) c.100 years ago as being located "in the Nursery", where it was described as a "Maidenhair ash" (*F. dimorpha* var. *dumosa*). The plant was introduced in 1865 and is characterised as a bush with tiny leaflets and interlocking branches, just like the grafted specimen we observed. Near it is a fallen copper beech, locally known as the 'spider tree', on which the local youths take delight in playing. In the glen of the Tollcross burn we

found some vigorously sprouting Cappadocian maples (*Acer cappadocicum*), reproducing by means of suckers, and a number of fairly young box elder (*A. negundo*), one of which was producing samara fruits. The glen also contains a few recently planted types of evergreen oak (*Quercus ilex*). At the foot of the glen we came across a *Sorbus* hybrid, possibly *S. x thuringiaca*, a cross between rowan and the common whitebeam.

Walking back up towards the south side of the house and east of the path above the glen are two fine black walnuts (*Juglans nigra*), the upper one of which is the biggest recorded in Scotland for both height and girth. Across the lawns to the west of the Winter Gardens are a fine Hungarian oak (*Quercus frainetto*) and two young specimens of incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*). A group of trees north and west of the glasshouses includes a fine hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) as well as what are probably a white ash (*F. americana*) and two red ash (*F. pennsylvanica*). *The Proceedings of the Society* record that in June, 1902 a guided tour of Tollcross park was led by the then Superintendent of Parks, James Whitton, responsible for laying out this park. Several exotic ash trees were recorded, including the two just mentioned and *F. dimorphus* (sic), probably the Afghan ash (see above), as well as others that are no longer there. The tulip tree previously mentioned is also recorded.

Moving northwards brought us to some boundary plantings that include many bird cherries (*Prunus padus*) stunning when in flower en masse. Heading back towards the children's farm and visitor centre at the Wellshot Road entrance we passed yellow buckeye (*Aesculus flava*), one of a few *Aesculus* spp. in the park infected with bleeding canker disease (see above). By the farm a dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) grows whilst in front of the visitors' centre is a row of silver maples (*Acer saccharinum*). We completed our all too brief tour of the park by returning to our start point via part of the glen just west of the visitor centre where purple filbert (*Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea') and Irish yews (*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata') grow.

We are indebted to Graeme Golding, arbor officer with GCC, for drawing our attention to management issues and trees we would have missed and to Matt Rae, local ranger and member of the Friends of Tollcross Park who did likewise and helped during the recesses for this visit and to Alastair Gunning, Kelvingrove, for geological information.

Trinley Brae and Bingham's Pond, 5th July 2010

Cath Scott/Sheila Russell

The aim of these excursions was to look at two Glasgow sites where habitat creation has recently been carried out.

Trinley Brae

We started off in the morning at Trinley Brae, in High Knightswood, and were lucky to have bright warm weather. Trinley Brae is part of a Meadow Demonstration Project that Land and Environmental Services, Glasgow City Council, are carrying out (part funded by SNH). The project is testing different methods of large scale meadow creation to find the most cost effective and

successful method. Meadows have been created using varying ground preparation techniques (soil stripping, scarification and a control) and sowing seeds/planting plugs. Different methods of grassland management are also being tested. This is a challenging site for machinery due to the steepness of the ground, so the results will be interesting.

On the excursion we used sweep nets to survey the meadows and hedgerows for invertebrates and recorded a number of interesting species. This included four different species of hover fly and six species of moth. Common green grasshoppers were in abundance and could be heard stridulating/singing; a sign of a healthy meadow.

It was also interesting to see 7-spot ladybirds pupating. And we were lucky to see a newly emerged adult without the dark spots developed.

Bingham's Pond

Our numbers increased for the second part of the excursion, as more people joined us at Bingham's Pond.

Before the pond was naturalised in 2003, a typical pond dipping session revealed few aquatic invertebrates, mainly mosquito larvae, water hoglouse and a couple of species of zooplankton.

It was hoped that by increasing the aquatic vegetation in the pond, the biodiversity of aquatic faunal species would also increase. It was therefore with some excitement that the pond dipping started to produce trays of animals. Immediately noticeable were the large numbers of water boatmen, both *Corixa* and *Notonecta* species, as well as numerous molluscs of all shapes and sizes. Five species of gastropod; bladder snail, common Bithynia, keeled ram's horn snail, wandering snail and great pond snail were identified. It should be noted that the great pond snails were some of the biggest ever seen. Horny orb mussel was also found. Damselfly larvae, freshwater hog louse and freshwater shrimp as well as leeches, flatworms, *Daphnia* sp. and copepods all added to the growing list of species as did 3-spined sticklebacks. Freshwater fish lice were also recorded which must have been feeding on the sticklebacks.

While the pond dipping was taking place, others were choosing less watery habitats to explore. Adult common blue damselflies provided a link with the pond minibeast survey. A candy stripe spider *Enoplognatha ovata* was found in the vegetation next to the pond. There were also a range of bumble bees (red-tailed, buff-tailed, garden and common carder), hover flies and butterflies noted. A number of species of interest were found including a leaf-cutter bee *Magachile willughbiella*, which was only the second record for Glasgow. The surveying was also rewarded with two firsts for Glasgow. These were the crane fly *Tipula couckeii* and the solitary bee *Colletes davesanus* (female pictured below).

Many thanks to Jeanne Robinson, Mike Rutherford and Richard Weddle for their invaluable help with surveying and identification.

Editor's note:

In mid December 2009, for several days there were a dozen or more Goosanders on Bingham's Pond, peaking at 20 on 16th December. After that numbers declined rapidly, so they must have eaten most of the sticklebacks!

Visit to Glasgow University Library, 12th January 2010

Roger Downie

20 or so members visited the special collections, where the books on display were:

Birds and some famous naturalists

One volume of Audubon: *Birds of America* (1827-1838)

One volume of Gould: *Birds of Great Britain* (1862-1873)

Medieval manuscript of falconry with illustrations (15th Century)

Albinus: *Natural History of Birds* (1731-1738)

James Douglas: notes on the Guernsey Lily - with red chalk drawings (18th Century)

Gilbert White: *Natural History of Selborne* (1833)

Charles Darwin: *Origin of Species* (1st Edition, 1859)

Gosse: *A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire coast* (1853)

Plants

Thornton: *Temple of Flora* (1799-1807)

One volume of John Evelyn: *Silva (forest trees)* (1786)

Sowerby: *English Fungi* (1797-1803)

Fuchs: *De Historia Stirpium* (1542)

Animals, Insects and others

Merian: *Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung und sonderbare Blumennahrung* (1679)

Drury: *Illustrations of Natural History* (1770-1773)

Moses Harris: *An Exposition of English Insects* (1782)

Renard: *Poissons, ecrevisses et crabes* (1754)

Gesner: *Icones animalium* (1551-1587)

Lister: *Historiae ... Conchyliorum* (1692-1697)

Bell: *Monograph of the Testudinata* (1832-1836)

Thanks go to Julie Gardham, Senior Assistant Librarian, for organising this excellent visit, during which we were able to touch and read these ancient books, and marvel at the descriptive English, and the beautiful line drawings and illuminations. Any member can arrange to see some old books on request.

Dragonfly and Damselfly Identification

Field Study Centre, Kindrogan 17-19th June 2009

Kim McEwen

Thanks to the bursary from GNHS I was able to attend a dragonfly and damselfly identification course at the Kindrogan Field Study Centre in Perthshire.

The course, expertly run by Jonathan Willet, focused on the eleven common species of dragonfly and damselfly found in Scotland. The mornings were spent in the classroom learning how to tell the different species apart in both their adult and larval stages, with the afternoons spent splashing in and around ponds trying

to identify the insects in the field. We found many of the common species on our field trips and were extremely lucky to come across a small pond, not far from the field centre, to find dozens of large red damselflies in various stages of emergence.

I picked this course so I could begin recording these insects on Cathkin Marsh Wildlife Reserve, South East of Glasgow, which the wildlife reserve at that I manage. Previously, I had found the identification of these insects, particularly the blue damsels, rather impossible. However, after completing the course I have had no problems identifying the different species and could not wait to begin recording on the reserve, particularly as there were no records in the 10 km square in which the reserve is located. I have already begun submitting records of damselflies, of which we have all of the five common species. I also hope to run a public event at the reserve to try and encourage more people to record these insects as the identification course has given me both the skills and confidence to do this.

I cannot recommend this course highly enough for anyone interested in learning more about these fascinating insects, and I would like to say a huge thank you to GNHS and BRISC for giving me the opportunity to attend the course.

Training Bursaries

Richard Weddle

Once again BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland) and GNHS (Glasgow Natural History Society) are each offering 2 Bursaries of £150 to attend a Natural History course at the Field Studies Council's centre at Kindrogan, Perthshire or any other FSC centre in the UK.

The Bursaries are open to anyone living in Scotland. Courses must be chosen from the FSC's taxonomy courses listed under Professional Development Programmes. For more details and an application form see www.brisc.org.uk/news/Bursaries.rtf - there will shortly be a link to this page on the GNHS website.

The closing date for applications is 1st March 2010. Please note that courses at FSC centres do generally cost more than £150; the bursary is not intended to cover the full cost of a course.

Hoverfly Identification Course

Richard Weddle

We are planning a course in Glasgow like that we held in 2008. As before it will be in two parts - a spring weekend and an autumn weekend.

The 'spring' weekend will be on 27-28th March 2010 in the Zoology Museum (Graham Kerr). That weekend will cover the basics including ID skills; there'll be another weekend in September or October which will include some field-work, and students will be asked to bring along specimens they have captured during the intervening months for help with ID if required. We might manage to get Graham Rotheray (NMS) to come along to talk about larvae on that occasion too.

At this stage we are looking for provisional bookings for the March weekend, with confirmation (and payment about £45) when the September date is known - which I hope will be decided before the end of February. But if you're interested,

please don't wait till then as you may be too late! It will be run by Roger Morris and Stuart Ball, the Syrphidae recording scheme supremos, under the joint auspices of GNHS, the Hunterian Museum and Glasgow Museums, and is partly funded by a grant from the Blodwen Lloyd Binns bequest.

Do let me know if you're interested - soon please, because there's a lot of interest again, and room for only 12 participants.

Dr Kathleen Calver: 1913–2009

Colin Currie

Kathleen Calver, who died recently at the age of 96 in a Glasgow nursing home, was for many decades a keen botanist, hill-walker, and bird-watcher, and an active member of various relevant clubs and societies.

Her first degree was in botany. She later trained as a pharmacist, and subsequently completed a Ph.D. in bacteriology, evaluating a new drug for sleeping sickness. She served for many years as a bacteriologist, and was a founder member of the NHS at its inception in 1948. 50 years later, in her mid-80s, she attended a celebration dinner for the Scottish NHS, and was mildly surprised to find herself a centre of attention, and being introduced to various dignitaries as a lively survivor from that bygone era.

Her interests were many and varied, and her pursuit of them serious and scholarly. Once, on a canal towpath, she spotted a previously undescribed hybrid toad-flax, thus earning herself a footnote in a massive tome on the plants of Glasgow. Again she was modestly surprised.

She was an adventurous traveller, and her interest in botany took her far and wide. Years ago, in search of rare mosses and failing to take into account the Cold War, she strayed inadvertently from Northeast Norway into Soviet Russia. Happily, the frontier guards were sympathetic, and gently redirected her to the border and to safety.

She was a keen hill-walker, later a rambler, and – in her late 80s – still what she called an 'ambler'. Her love of bird-watching was great, and her knowledge extensive. She passed her enthusiasm on to her nephews and nieces; and even long after her sight had failed she could helpfully identify for them species and their variants simply from a telephoned description.

She will be missed by her nephews and nieces, great-nephews and a great – nieces, and the numerous friends she made in a long career and a long, varied and active retirement.

Next Newsletter - copy to David Palmar by 22nd March 2010 please.

Please send contributions by email, preferably as .rtf, .doc or .docx (Word 2007) format. If you have time, please italicise taxonomic names. Please use **Verdana** font and size **12 points**. If sending photos, please submit only a few, and make them small if you know how to do that. (Please ask for advice if you want to know how to make them under 100Kb each for emailing) and always as **separate jpg files**, definitely **not** as part of a Word document.