

GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2013

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
22 March 2013

GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:
www.gnhs.org.uk

2013 Subscriptions

Richard Weddle

Subscriptions fall due on 1st January 2013. If you receive your Newsletter by post, I have enclosed a renewal form with this Newsletter if my records show you do not pay by standing order, and have not already paid. For email recipients I'll send a separate email reminder as necessary.

2013 MEETINGS – In the GU Boyd Orr Building, unless stated otherwise

February Tuesday 12th

7.15pm Photographic Night: photographic competition results and prizegiving, then members' own photographic shows. There is still room for one or two members to give a presentation.

March

Thursday 7th

6.00pm Graham Kerr Building LT1
Glasgow University Expeditions Report Back
Jointly with GU Exploration Society (most expeditions are supported by BLB)

Tuesday 12th

6.30pm AGM; followed by lecture: Dangerous liaisons of animals and their viruses;
Mandy Glass

April

Tuesday 9th (Jointly with Hamilton and Paisley NHS)

6.30pm Graham Kerr Building LT1
Tutorial: Scottish Spiders; Chris Cathrine
7.30pm Lecture: The Natural History of Bute; Angus Hannah

May

Tuesday 14th

6.30pm Tutorial: Auditing Glasgow's Biodiversity: ten (eleven) years on
Richard Sutcliffe and Richard Weddle
7.30pm Lecture: Hiding in plain sight: the work of Hugh Cott, artist and naturalist.
Isla Forsyth

June

Saturday 22nd/Sunday 23rd

Conference: Natives, Aliens and Reintroductions: how does ecology inform wildlife conservation in Scotland?

Natives, Aliens and Reintroductions Conference

Richard Weddle

We are planning to hold a series of events next year, including a conference in June entitled "Natives, Aliens and Reintroductions: how does ecology inform wildlife conservation in Scotland?" It's a joint venture between GNHS, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Museums, Glasgow Science Festival, RSPB, SWT and others. It also forms part of the festival marking the 100th anniversary of the British Ecological Society, and is partly funded by BES.

The main conference weekend will take place in the Graham Kerr Building on June 22nd and 23rd; the first day will be a series of talks, and the second workshops and excursions; there will also be posters on display during both days. We also plan to have a schools event, probably on June 14th, and we hope that a number of next year's summer excursions will also address this theme.

There will be further events, including schools activities, during the Glasgow Science Festival (6th - 16th June). And on Saturday June 15th, also in the Graham Kerr Building, there will be a day devoted to the work of Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), the Paisley naturalist and poet, organised by the Hunterian Museum and the University's Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine; this is also part funded by BES.

Full details and booking form to follow.

Photography Course

David Palmar

David is leading a one-day photography walk at Mugdock Country Park on Sunday 14th April (not a GNHS event). More information under the Further Information menu on www.photoscot.co.uk, and bookings through Mugdock Country Park.

Changing Flora of Glasgow

Richard Weddle

We still have a few copies left of *The Changing Flora of Glasgow* (JH Dickson, P Macpherson, K Watson and TN Tait (2000)), which we obtained from the publishers at a special discount price, and are offering copies to members for only £14.00, considerably less than from other sources (e.g. Amazon £51.00). Not only does this book show where individual species of plant are to be found in and around the City, it also gives historical notes from earlier Floras and includes accounts of the city's natural, social and economic history and their bearing on wild plants.

We recommend you collect your copy in person, as it would cost at least £4.50 to post. We will have copies on sale at meetings. If you can't manage to a meeting and you would like a copy, please contact Morag Mackinnon, Mary Child, Richard Weddle (info@glasgownaturalhistory.org.uk), or Peter Macpherson.

Flora of Renfrewshire

Richard Weddle

The long-awaited *Flora of Renfrewshire* by Keith Watson is scheduled to appear in July 2013. GNHS members may pre-order a copy at only £32, (excluding P&P) if ordered by March 31st. The post-publication price will be £45. To avoid confusion, please note that the pre-publication price for those who are NOT members of GNHS is £35 (there is a separate flier for this). The extra discount for members is in recognition of financial support by the Blodwen Lloyd Binns bequest.

We can arrange for you to avoid postage by collecting your copy, by arrangement, at the Graham Kerr Building, in addition to the Glasgow Museums locations mentioned in the flier.

This is the first full flora of the old county of Renfrewshire (modern-day Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and south-west Glasgow). It marks the culmination of over 50 years of field recording by local botanists and over 18 years of fieldwork and in-depth research of historical records by the author.

Keith Watson is Glasgow Museums' Botany Curator and has botanised in the Glasgow area for over 25 years. He has co-authored *The Changing Flora of Glasgow* and has been the Botanical Society of the British Isles Recorder for Renfrewshire (VC 76) since 1994.

The flora contains:

Over 1500 species accounts that include first record, status, distribution and ecology

More than 660 dot maps of native and frequently encountered alien species

Introductory chapters on geology, soils, landscape, climate, historical recording and the changing environment

Discussion chapters on distribution patterns, floristic changes and plant and habitat conservation

Twenty-four pages of colour plates of maps and photographs showing botanical hotspots and local notable species.

FROM THE REVIEWS EDITOR

Bob Gray

Book received in exchange for reviews in *The Glasgow Naturalist*

Guide to Freshwater Invertebrates

Michael Dobson *et al*

FBA Scientific Publication No. 68

Freshwater Biological Association 2012

25% discount for FBA members

Hardback £33.00

This book is essentially an updated version of TT Macan's widely consulted work, *A Guide to Freshwater Invertebrate Animals* (1959), twice revised and long out of print. The introduction explains how animals are classified and named and the first part of the book contains sections dealing with the practicality of collecting and preserving specimens. As a matter of interest the Protozoa, since they are now considered part of the Protist Kingdom, separate from Animals, are not included in this book, although Macan did include them.

Whereas the first general guide to freshwater invertebrates published by the FBA (no. 67) dealt with the macro-invertebrate families used in freshwater assessment, this second guide deals with these and many more organisms besides. So the bulk of this book contains straightforward keys that cover those freshwater invertebrates most commonly found in Britain and Ireland. They are accompanied by many line drawings that emphasise important distinguishing features.

A useful bibliography of other related texts encourages further research.

EXCURSION REPORT

Glen Affric Weekend, 9–10th June 2012

Bob Gray

At the start of our eagerly anticipated visit eleven of us were met at the Dog Falls car park by Sandra Reid, a Forestry Commission environmental ranger based in Glen Affric. Much of the area was purchased in 1951 by the Forestry Commission which, by a combination of fencing and reduction of deer numbers, encouraged the natural regeneration of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and its associated flora and fauna. It was one of the first native pinewoods to be actively managed for conservation. This management was so successful that Glen Affric was declared a National Nature Reserve in 2002. The **Dog Falls trail** is one means of access and along it we were able to find such plants as common wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*), though not the rare one-flowered wintergreen (*Moneses uniflora*) which is restricted to 2 sites on the reserve, chickweed wintergreen (*Trientalis europaea*) and both lesser and common wayblades (*Listera cordata* and *L. ovata*). Sandra was able to locate for us some specimens of creeping lady's tresses (*Goodyera repens*) which is very difficult to find. The pinewoods here are particularly rich in lichens some of which are nationally rare. One, *Bryoria furcellata*, even has legal protection.

Amongst the pines were scattered some "granny pines" whose core age is some 250-300 years although they appeared by girth to be about 100 years old. This stunted growth is explained by the exposure these trees experienced during the early part of their lives when the Clan Chisholm encouraged deer and sheep that prevented much regeneration and allowed the growth of only occasional trees. The result of allowing natural regeneration was plain to see: in this area many 30 year old Scots pines (their age could be determined by counting their branch whorls) are the same height as the older exposed pines. A school of thought used to consider that the best-shaped trees had been removed for lumber purposes and that those left were the most misshapen and so unsuitable either for timber or for seed collection. This view is now discounted and the seed collected or allowed to spread from these old pines germinates and grows into finely shaped trees. Their phenotype (appearance) belies their genotype (genetic make-up).

Wood ant (*Formica aquilonia*) nests were occasionally in evidence on south facing, warmer slopes below the pines. The activity of these social insects was plain to see. Evidence of pine marten was found in the form of scats deposited on an old seat. Dissection revealed the remains of small mammals in the diet and the sweet smell was indicative of pine marten. A badger scrape was found by the track where it had been feeding on pignut. From the bridge over the rapidly flowing River Affric we saw a dipper and growing from the rocky, steep banks a number of regenerated aspen (*Populus tremula*).

In the early afternoon we passed old pines and birches as we made for the **Coire Loch**, a natural "kettle hole", remnant of the retreating ice from some 10,000 years ago. Today this forms an ideal habitat for most of the 14 different dragonfly species found in Scotland. We saw a few northern emeralds (*Somatochlora arctica*) over the water and found the nymphal skeleton of an emerald damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*) on the boggy margin of the loch. Northern emeralds are very rare in Britain and are protected in Europe. Here insectivorous butterwort (*Pinguicula*

vulgaris) and sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) were in evidence. Some old oak trees (*Quercus petraea*) were found to be regenerating not far from here. This area is at a lower altitude than the site we had visited in the morning. Hence the soils are more fertile and the site is more sheltered. Scots pine tends to be more successful on poorer, well-drained soils and can withstand more exposure than the oak.

The calls of many birds were heard: willow warbler, chaffinch, robin, wren, cuckoo, blue tit and crested tit. Flocks of siskin, tree pipits and Scottish crossbills (Scotland's only endemic bird) were seen flying overhead at Coire Loch. These flocks are seeking food and this is their breeding season. Amongst lower plants we found oak and beech ferns as well as lemon scented.

Later in the afternoon we headed for the **Am Meallan viewpoint trail** between the west end of Loch Beinn a' Mheadhain and the east end of Loch Affric. A short climb led to the summit that gave us a fine view towards both east and west Glen Affric showing the classic U-shape caused by glaciation as well as the moraines and fluvio-glacial sands and gravels left by the retreating ice. Eastwards the pines cover the moraines whilst birches together with alders, willows and aspen appear amongst the pines below the moraines. Fossil pollen, stomata and charcoal from a lake sedimentary sequence indicate continuous pinewood presence for the past 8300 years. To the west few trees are seen. Pollen evidence from peat and from lake sediments reveals the area to the west was dominated from about 10,000 years ago by deciduous trees like birch, rowan, hazel, willow and alder with occasional incursions of pine or oak. The woodland was replaced by heath and grassland over a period of c.500 years around 4000 BP (probably by changing climate) prior to coming of Bronze Age farmers.

Loch Beinn a' Mheadhain varies in height according to the amount of water required for hydro-electric power at the Fasnakyle Station downstream. It is fed from the damned Loch Mullardoch by means of water flowing through a tunnel through the intervening mountain. Floating island rafts provide nesting sites for black-throated divers and common scoters.

On Sunday morning we met a local worthy, Stuart Grant, at the entrance to the conservation village of Tomich, built to re-house the tenants of Lord Tweedmouth when he built the nearby Giusachan House. Stuart escorted us towards the top of the Plodda Falls, in the meantime stopping to examine firstly, the elaborate Tomich drinking fountain, memorial to the Tweedmouths, and secondly, at the west end of the village, the European silver fir (*Abies alba*) planted to commemorate the accession of the Queen to the throne in 1952.

Historically, felled timber was extracted from inland forests by flotation downriver to the coast (in this case via Strathglass). Authorities consider that exploitation of the East Glen Affric pinewoods was limited by the existence of waterfalls, such as those we visited and where the local power station was constructed. These falls would cause the timber being floated downstream to be broken up. Hence less timber was removed. "Plodda" may be derived from the old Norse meaning "float" or "swift flowing" and this area marks the southernmost reach of the earls of Orkney who may have exploited the forests of north-east Scotland to provide timber for their longships in the middle ages.

The view from the platform projecting over the 40 m high **Plodda Falls** was spectacular, the close sight of the tops of so many trees, especially European larch (*Larix decidua*) and Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), being particularly memorable. The latter were festooned with their long, pendulous cones. European larch grows better than Japanese larch (*L. kaempferi*) in the drier, eastern parts of Scotland and its timber is superior. Growing out from the cliff face near the upper falls were many native aspen saplings. Our group made its way down to view the full majesty of the falls from lower down. At the bottom we admired many massive Douglas firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and European silver firs from 19th Century plantings. Most of these exotic trees were planted by Lord Tweedmouth who bought the Glen Affric Estate from Clan Chisholm in the mid 19th Century. Three Douglas firs from here were used to replace the original masts on Captain Scott's RRS Discovery berthed in Dundee. The Norway spruce logs we found stacked up near the foot of the Falls, however, were only some 30 years of age by ring count. The width of these rings indicated rapid growth and so poor quality timber.

Along the track leading to **Giusachan House** (Gaelic for pine forests), claimed to be the site of the origin of the Golden Retriever breed, were many magnificent giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). What had been a magnificent building is now a ruin. Around it, however, are some interesting remains. Firstly Stuart showed us a glacial erratic that he had uncovered as it marked the end of a lay-line and on it he had discovered some prehistoric cup markings that have been authenticated by the Archaeological Survey. In a nearby pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) he described how he had noticed a goosander nesting. Furthermore he observed the fledglings dropped from their 3 m high nest in the tree hole to the ground. They then had to cover c.200 m to reach the river! Finally, on a hillock just outside the remains of the house was a partial circle of 5 common lime trees (*Tilia x europaea*) (previously there had been 8) around the perimeter. This marked the site of a Bronze Age tomb.

Stuart then took us to the "secret" Home Waterfall the site of a defunct water-powered generator. The gully leading into the falls contained some huge Lawson's cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) and a Morinda spruce (*Picea smithiana*). Signs of gardening were a variegated grass and hard shield fern (?) (*Polystichum aculeatum*), rare in N. Scotland. Our guide refused to let us leave without taking us back to his home for some tea. We got more than we bargained for. Stuart had worked for some years as a woodsman on the estate and constructed his fairy tale home from an old shed. Apart from the roof, which looks like thatch but is actually concrete, he has made extensive use of timber throughout, not only to construct the rooms but also to furnish the whole place with his own hands. He has used ancient pine roots washed down the River Affric from tree felling at the time of dam construction, burr elm, yew and European larch. He has even satisfactorily used a piece of giant redwood, despite the fact it is supposed not to be a good timber for furniture making. An example of his ingenuity was the fridge in the kitchen the reverse side of which he used to supply heat for a towel cupboard in the bathroom next door. (You can see his house online – Stuart's World of Wood April 2006, www.travel.webshots.com). His garden has a waterwheel and pine martens occupy his roof space!

This was a most memorable weekend. As Stevens and Carlisle (1959) put it "To stand in them [the Affric pinewoods] is to feel the past". We are indebted to both Sandra Reid and Stuart Grant for their time.

**Letter from the Goldenland 3
Hortense chases Ragondin (Coypu)
Catfish)**

Jim Dickson and Jenny Lécivain

We live just where the river Durgeon joins the slow flowing Saône which joins the Rhone before reaching the Mediterranean, a long way to the south (Photo 1). It's a charming spot, quiet apart from the very occasional large lorry going to the nearby small factory for wood products. Coypus live in the Durgeon. These large South American rodents are widespread in France and considered "nuisible" (a pest).

Before reaching Chemilly the Durgeon flows through Vesoul, the nearby county town, and we have seen there a ragondin happily munching bread put out by somebody whose property runs down to the river very near the town centre.

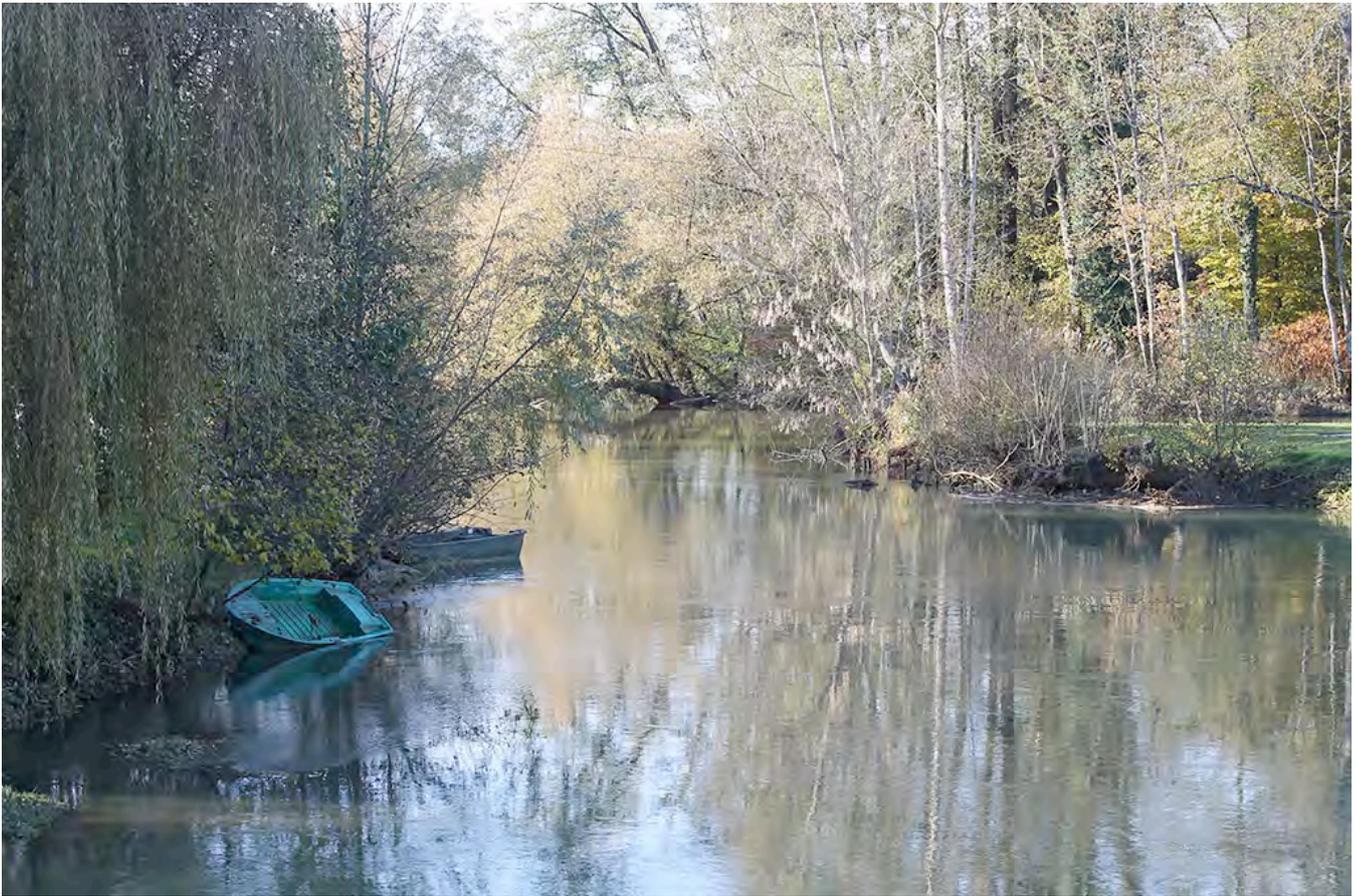
Hortense is Jenny's small black dog, though, if she had legs more appropriately long she would be considered big. She barks and chases anything and everything with feathers or fur, other dogs of no matter what size, cats, rabbits and stoats.

On one rare occasion she was not on the lead near a small tributary of the Durgeon. Soon she was off like a rocket to the riverbank but the ragondin's den was on the other side. She appeared to be about to jump in but then she vanished upstream running along the bank and reappeared at the den; obviously she had jumped in out of our sight and swum across. I called to her to jump in again and swim back to me but, such was the attraction of the den, she would not do so. Jenny had to take a long way round to retrieve the dog.

Both fishing and hunting are very popular in France; roe deer (chevreuil) and wild boar (sanglier) are common in the many extensive woodlands. One evening strolling along the bank of the Saône we chatted to a woman happily fishing. She told of hearing and seeing a recent commotion in the river and said it was a fish catching and eating a duck.

I thought to myself "I don't believe it!" Neither Jenny nor I had heard of such a fish but soon found out about the very large Wels Catfish which is a native of eastern Europe but has been introduced to both Britain and France. Some days later we encountered a fisherman who had just caught that very evening not one but two and they were on the bank still alive.

The fish is surely a candidate for the accolade "The ugliest freshwater fish in Europe". The larger of the two was over 1 m long (and they can be much larger). The widest part of the fish is the mouth and the body tapers all the way to the tail. It has evil-looking little eyes and an unpleasant dark colour. However, a redeeming feature is that some think it good to eat. Jenny tells me that I myself ate it at lunch in Vienna a few years ago. I do not remember any great tastiness.



The slow flowing Saône, by Jim Dickson



Waxwing Irruption in 2012 David Palmar

Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) are irregular winter visitors to Glasgow, as they migrate south from their breeding territories in Scandinavia to find food. They feed on red berries, and prefer Rowan, Cotoneaster, Hawthorn, or as in this case, Berberis.

Usually, they are more frequent in the east of Scotland, but many hundreds were reported in the west last November and December, unusually reaching as far as Plockton, where 250 were seen in mid November. In Glasgow, they came into our garden in Kelvindale on 10th December. More of David's Waxwing pictures are on www.photoscot.co.uk/. To see them, just search for Waxwing.