



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April-May 2004

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(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
11th May 2004

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CONTENTS

Introduction	Loch Lomond and the Trossachs
Events And Excursions List - Spring	Loch Lomond Excursions 2004
Weekend Excursion	Reports by Members
Breeding Bird Survey	Glasgow Museums Resource Centre

INTRODUCTION

David Palmar, Newsletter Editor

I am sure now that it's warmer that you will enjoy reading the enclosed excursion programme. Please keep sending me Newsletter contributions, by email to the address above (keep it private to Society members please).

LOCH LOMOND AND THE TROSSACHS

Roger Downie, President

This year's excursion programme has a strong flavour of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and I thank Joyce Alexander for her work in organising it all, also all the excursion leaders.

Our idea is that this focus on the natural history of a single area, related to the establishment of Scotland's first national park, will provide material for a Saturday conference in the autumn. I'd like to hear from excursion leaders whether they would be willing to give a short presentation (15 minutes, or so) on the subject of their excursion at the conference. I do intend to invite other speakers as well, but I think it would be good to have the backbone of the meeting based around GNHS members and the excursions.

EVENTS AND EXCURSIONS LIST – APRIL-MAY 2004

Contact Organiser to check dates, arrange transport if necessary, and to confirm interest. All buses leave from Kelvin Way as close as possible to the car park entrance to Kelvingrove Museum and Art Galleries.

APRIL

Tue. 6th 7.15pm: Members' slide night – volunteers please contact Sandy McNeil to help him arrange the programme.

Wed. 14th 5.30 until 7.00pm A wine and cheese organising meeting will be held in the Zoology Museum **for volunteers helping with the biodiversity survey.**

Sat. 17th Biodiversity Survey of University of Glasgow – see article by Bob Gray.

Sat. 17th Gartocharn. Otter Tracks. 10.00am–1.00pm. Dominic McCafferty

Sat. 24th Visit to Natural History section of new Glasgow Museums Resource Centre. Meet GMRC entrance 10.30am. See back page for map. Numbers limited to 15.

MAY

Sat. 1st Aberfoyle. Ornithology, Botany, Geology. Meet Scottish Woollen Mill Centre 11.00am. Joint with Edinburgh Nats. Ian McCallum.

Sat. 8th/Sun. 9th Caerlaverock based weekend.
See Joyce Alexander's Weekend Excursion article for details.

Sat. 15th Rowardennan Field Station. Insects. Meet Sallochay car park, 10.30am. Geoff Hancock –Hunterian Museum.

Sat. 29th Cashel, Loch Lomond. Ornithology. Bus 9.00am. Please use booking form. Sandy McNeil.

LOCH LOMOND EXCURSIONS 2004

Joyce Alexander

Many of the excursions for this year have been themed around Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. This is to complement the forthcoming one day conference on Loch Lomond to be held by the Society later in the year. The first of those excursions will be led by Dominic McCafferty who will be looking for Otter Tracks, and perhaps the creatures themselves, in the Gartocharn area on **17th April**.

Ian McCallum is leading a walk in the Aberfoyle area on **1st May** which will include Botany, Ornithology and Geology and this will be followed by a visit to the University Field Station at Rowardennan on the 15th when Geoff Hancock will help us to study insects.

Some years ago members of the Society visited Cashel, on the east side of Loch Lomond, and spent a splendid day there. On the **29th May** we return there with Sandy McNeill, for a birdwatching excursion.

In **June** Bob Gray is leading an excursion to Kilmun on the **5th**, our Summer Social is again, appropriately, at The Oak Tree Inn at Balmaha on **Tues 8th** and, to complete our themed excursions for June, Edna Stewart will be leading a Botanical excursion to Millarrochy, again on the east side of the Loch, on the **12th**.

We have an excursion on **July 31st**, this time to the Water Meadow at Callander in the morning and to Loch Ard after lunch to view archaeological remains with Jim Connolly.

Our programme of themed events concludes with two separate excursions to Inversnaid. The first of those on **12th September** will be with Keith Watson, who will introduce us to the wonderful Bryophytes to be found there, while the second will be a Fungus Foray, led by Robin Jones, on **2nd October**.

As you will see from the printed programme, other interesting excursions have been arranged, and it is hoped that there will be something to interest all members throughout the duration of the programme.

WEEKEND EXCURSION 8th-9th MAY 2004

Joyce Alexander

This will take the form of a weekend car outing. On Saturday morning we will meet at 10.45 in the car park of The Grey Mare's Tail, east of Moffat on the A708 Selkirk road. From there we will walk to Dobb's Linn in the company of NTS ranger, Dan Watson, to search for graptolite fossils from the Ordovician period of Earth's history. En route we should see some interesting flora. There will be no charge for this part of the weekend but Dan would appreciate a donation to the NTS – say £2.50 or £3.00 per person. The excursion will last for the best part of three hours. If anyone wishes to be driven to the foot of the Linn rather than walk there this can be arranged.

It is hoped that after this we will have time to visit Historic Scotland's Nature Trail at Caerlaverock Castle on the Solway. After a meal at The Nith Hotel in Glencaple we go to Caerlaverock WWT Reserve in time for 8.30pm to view the reserve's colony of Natterjack toads (the most northerly colony in Britain). There will be an entrance charge of £3.60 per person with group vouchers for this visit. I will have a supply of vouchers with me.

On Sunday morning we visit Kirkconnell Flow at 10.00 where we will be met by SNH ranger Tim Dawson. Tim will accompany us around this raised peat bog and will explain the habitat to us. After lunch it is hoped to make a short visit to Arbigland Gardens before heading for home. There will be a small entrance fee for this visit but as the gardens are closed until April I cannot say for definite how much this will be.

Accommodation has been provisionally booked for Saturday night at The Nith Hotel - £30 pp - and this will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Otherwise I would request that intending participants make their own arrangements in one of the Dumfries hotels or guesthouses.

A meal can be ordered at The Nith Hotel on Saturday before we set off for Caerlaverock and packed lunches can be ordered at £5.00 each from the hotel for Sunday for those staying there. Participants should bring a packed lunch for Saturday and warm waterproof clothing is a necessity.

Walking poles would be useful for the excursions throughout the weekend and Tim Dawson advises me that wellingtons would be the best kind of footwear for Kirkconnell though boots would be a good second best. If you are interested in participating in this weekend please contact Joyce Alexander.

REPORTS BY MEMBERS

Bird Flu - Alien Invasion??

Norman Grist

Maybe you've heard enough about this - but here are a few natural history thoughts.

We see on TV what must be enormous numbers of people being heavily exposed to the virulent type A/H5N1 strain of influenza in farmed chickens and ducks in Asia. Reported deaths seem relatively few (non-fatal proven infections even fewer). Perhaps they affect only a small minority of humans, those dangerously susceptible ("constitutionally" = genetically). Do we see "survival of the fittest" (natural selection) in action - evolution of our own species by "culling" the "unfit"?

The 15 known "H" subtypes of influenza are widespread, adapted to infect both wild and domesticated birds, also some mammals - humans included. Each is adapted mainly to a particular species or family of vertebrates, not so easily infecting others. Co-evolution by natural selection minimises damage to the usual host. If the virus meets a novel host and "fits" its cells well enough to establish infection, it may not be controlled efficiently by the new host, but cause silent, trivial, severe or fatal disease depending largely on the genetic "constitution" of the host. Only H5 and H7 strains have been found highly pathogenic, causing severe disease.

In a recent family outbreak of H5N1 infection, the Viet-Nameese man and his two sisters (who shared the family genes) died. His genetically different new wife, who also helped to prepare chickens for the feast, recovered from her illness, and the wedding guests were unaffected.. This may reflect the importance of relevant human genes. Maybe most of us would also be lucky, this time. Could this avian virus reach us here?

The African West Nile virus has now been carried by free-ranging and migrant birds throughout most of North America and beyond. Most human infections with it have been silent or trivial, but severe or fatal in a few. H5N1 influenza could also be carried by migrant birds, though their migration is mainly north-south. This may be how H7N1 virus reached poultry in the Netherlands last year. Farmed populations of fowls or ducks might be the first to show its arrival. Their inbred populations are probably less resistant to these viruses than genetically more diverse wild birds, as we see in E Asia, and spread of infection is helped by their crowding. Among wild birds one example of H5N1 spread was a dead peregrine found with H5N1 infection in Hong Kong this January - indeed a "dead-end host", maybe after an unwise meal of an infected prey!

Meantime intense studies coordinated by the World Health Organization seek possible vaccines in case dual infection of a human (or pig) with human-adapted influenza A and H5N1 provides a hybrid equipped with altered H5 molecules and well-adapted to attach to human cells - the presumed scenario for the 1918 influenza pandemic. We need our molecular biologists as well as plumbers!

Glasgow University Biodiversity Group

Bob Gray

A survey of the plants and animals of some parts of the main campus of Glasgow University will be carried out on Saturday, 17th April at 10.30am. The areas to be surveyed this year include Professors' Square, the ground sloping from the flagpole to the Kelvin and the wildlife garden. The aim is to draw up a database of organisms present and members of the Society are invited to participate in this survey together with students and other interested persons. The long-term objectives include using the database as a basis for teaching and for monitoring and developing the biodiversity of the campus.

A wine and cheese will be held in the Zoology Museum on Wednesday, 14th April from 5.30 until 7.00pm. in order to enable participants to meet each other and discuss plans for the survey.

Red Admirals in the Firth of Clyde

Bob Gray

No, not the surrender of the Soviet naval fleet...but read on....

Friday, 19th September 2003. Between Portachur Point on the SW end of Great Cumbrae and Rubh an Eun on the SE end of the Isle of Bute at about 13.00 hours. Slight northwesterly breeze, < force 2 on the Beaufort scale. About twelve Red Admiral butterflies, some 2 metres above sea level, heading in a SW direction +/- at right angles to the breeze were observed over a fifteen minute period in mid channel, about 1/2 mile from the Bute shore and heading towards the S end of Bute.

Despite many years sailing up and down the Clyde this is the first time the writer has observed such a phenomenon. Few if any pupae of this butterfly survive the winter in Britain and so it occurs as a migrant and summer breeding species. The early migrants arrive from Spain and Portugal mainly, later influxes from central Europe and France. From mid-August onwards, however, movement is increasingly, and by September almost entirely, one-way to the south or southwest, possibly triggered by shortening day length (*Millennium Atlas*) or by lower temperatures and increasing length of night (Chinery). Apparently some Red Admirals have been observed from the north French coast coming off the sea and then flying south (*Millennium Atlas*).

GNHS SUBSCRIPTIONS: £17

**Family Member (partner) £3 extra; School Children £1 extra;
Concession (under 21; full-time students; unemployed) - £8**

Name(s).....

Address.....

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**Send to: GNHS Membership Secretary
c/o Graham Kerr Building
University of Glasgow
GlasgowG12 8QQ**

On Sunday 22nd February the NCCPG (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens), the Glasgow and West of Scotland Horticultural Society, the Friends of Glasgow Botanic Gardens, the Friends of Greenbank Gardens, and ourselves, joined together to visit Cambo estate at Kingsbarns, near St Andrews on their Snowdrop Day.

It was a magnificent, but bitterly cold day, but, well wrapped up, we walked through the woods, carpeted with snowdrop, leucojeum and aconite, ending up at the sea, wild with white horses. Unforgettable! Mrs Erskine, of Cambo Estate, gave us a talk on the various species of snowdrop (about 160 varieties) and in particular four varieties which could be spotted in the woods, namely *Galanthus nivalis* (common snowdrop), *Galanthus elwisii* (larger with outer leaf wrapped round inner leaf), *Galanthus plicatus* (leaves with curled back edges) and *Galanthus waronowii* (= *G. ikaria*) (bright green recurved leaves). Of interest also was the small *G. Sophie North* called after one of the victims of the Dunblane disaster. The most widespread in the woods was *G. nivalis flore pleno*. Many of these were for sale. (I am grateful to other club members for this information!)

We also had a quick visit to the Botanic Gardens, St Andrews – timed exactly to correspond with the few minutes of bad weather we had. The hot houses were not only interesting but warm! The day ended with a most enjoyable scenic drive home in the sunset.

It may seem an unlikely scenario for as many as 51 people to book to go on a trip to the east coast on a wintry Sunday in February. The reason – not only the beautiful sunny weather, but also the fact that we went by bus – and this was achieved because the 5 organisations joined together to share the almost prohibitive cost of hiring a large bus. This raises the question whether this should be done more often. A quick poll amongst us showed that most thought that there should be at least one or two such outings per year.

We gratefully thank the organisers June McKay, Anne Murray and the NCCPG and look forward to a visit to Cambo next year.

Library Information**Joan Chapman, Librarian**

The library is slowly changing, and the over-full shelves are being reorganised. Gradually, older books are being transferred to a corridor cupboard opposite the exchange journals. There are many interesting books amongst the pre-1900 volumes and this hitherto-concealed part of the library is well worth exploring.

The society is grateful for members' donations of journals and books. Regular donations have been received from Jean Millar, Ruth Dobson and Norman Grist. Norman has also given us three volumes of "Wildlife Factfile" which contain a reference encyclopaedia of world animals. This information is stored on cards listing animals with details of order, family and genus. Shelf space can now be found for this interesting addition to our reference section. Members can add to the library by suggesting books that they find interesting.

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is now the main scheme for monitoring the breeding populations of widespread bird species in the UK.

We are very short of BBS observers in your area, and we have the

Following OS 1 km grid squares available in your area...

NN2706, NN2908, NN3208, NS2699, NS2761, NS3091, NS3680, NS3998,
NS4060, NS4281, NS4388, NS4598, NS4889, NS6042, NS6153, NS6766,
NS7727, NS8363, NT0244

What do I have to do? All you have to do is visit the BBS square allocated to you (as near to your home address as possible) twice during each breeding season (April to late June) to count all the birds you see and hear along two 1 km transect routes (just 5-6 hours of fieldwork per year).

Free bird-song cassettes. A set of bird song and call cassettes is available to all new BBS volunteers. The first tape consists of the calls and songs of the more difficult to identify species found in lowland Britain and is available to all new volunteers taking part in the scheme this year. The second tape concentrates on species typical of upland areas and will be given to people taking on an upland site.

Online birding; enter your data electronically via the web.

For the first time since the BBS began in 1994, you can now enter your BBS counts electronically via the web. The new BBS-Online application also allows you to view previous years data for your squares, and the web pages also provide you with a host of BBS results and information about the survey; see www.bto.org/bbs. BBS counts can also be submitted on paper forms.

NOTICES

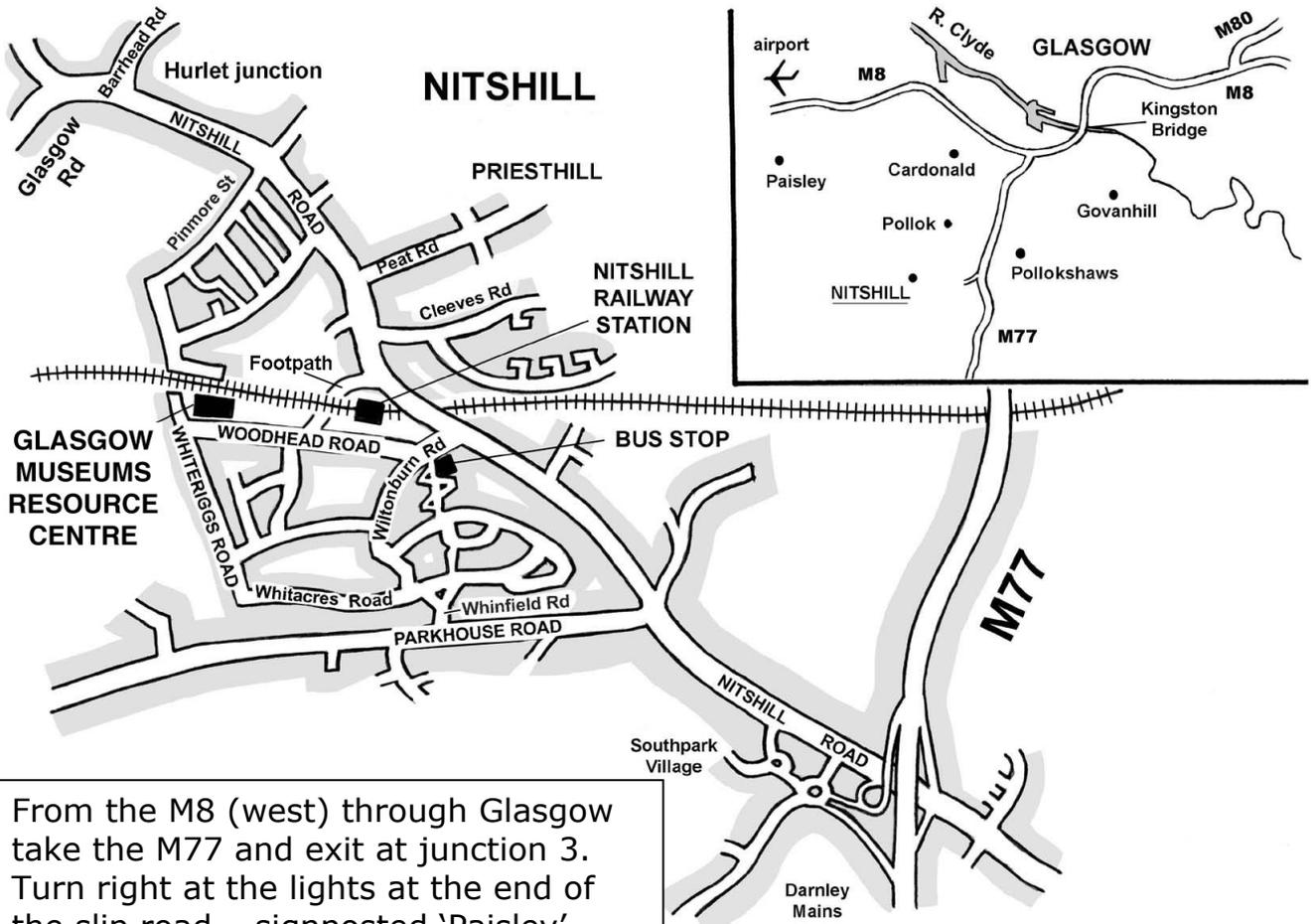
Deadline for next Newsletter, Tuesday 11th May 2004.

This time I received printouts of two contributions which had already been typed on a computer. If you have already typed an article on a computer, please send it on a floppy disc with a printout if you do not have email, to avoid unnecessary retyping!

General Correspondence to General Secretary: Mary Child.

Next year's talks programme is now being planned. We have a good list of possible speakers, but are still able to consider suggestions from members. Please send ideas soon, especially for the more practical kind of talk that could be a tutorial, to Roger Downie.

GNHS Visit to Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, 24th April 2004



From the M8 (west) through Glasgow take the M77 and exit at junction 3. Turn right at the lights at the end of the slip road – signposted 'Paisley'. Straight on through 6 sets of traffic lights then turn left before the road narrows and goes under the railway. Turn first right and the GMRC is at the end of Woodhead Road.

Alternatively you can get a train to Nitshill station (5 minutes walk from GMRC) from Glasgow Central. The trains run about every half hour and take just under 20 minutes.

This will be the first official visit by the society to the new headquarters of Glasgow Museums at Nitshill, which opened last year. The visit will allow members to see the extent of the natural history collections that were previously 'hidden away' in the basement of Kelvingrove. Come along to see the botany, geology, birds and mammals in the impressive new purpose-built stores. Richard Sutcliffe and other staff members will lead you around the stores, following which coffee will be provided and there will be a chance to discuss what has been seen.

Not all the collections are at Nitshill yet – the insects, some of the other invertebrates, the spirit collections and the mounted foreign vertebrates are still stored in other buildings and will not be transferred for a couple of years.

Meet at Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, 200 Woodhead Road, South Nitshill Industrial Estate, (NS518601) at 10.30am.

A maximum of 15 visitors are allowed in the stores at one time, so please book in advance to avoid disappointment! A second visit is planned on 28th August.