



GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

August 2009

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

**Next Newsletter Deadline
1 October 2009**

**GNHS is a Registered Scottish
Charity Web-site:
<http://www.gnhs.org.uk/>**

AUGUST EXCURSION:

Richard Sutcliffe is running an excursion on Sat 22nd or Sun 23rd August to the Falls of Clyde to see Purple Hairstreak butterflies. This excursion is weather-dependent; please contact Richard a day or two beforehand to confirm the date and time.

2009 INDOOR MEETINGS

September

Tuesday 15th Exhibition meeting: wine and nibbles
Zoology Museum, 7.30pm.

October

Wednesday 7th BLB Lecture: Learning about sound in animals:
Peter Slater. 5.00pm.

Note time and day

Tuesday 13th Tutorial: Harvestmen: Mike Rutherford. 6.30pm.
Lecture: Biodiversity in Glasgow.
Jim Coyle MBE. 7.30pm.

November

Tuesday 10th Tutorial: Solitary bees: Cathy Fiedler. 6.30pm.
Lecture: Evolution and diversity of trees:
Richard Ennos. 7.30pm.

December

Tuesday 8th Christmas Dinner. Café Connect, 348 Cathedral Street, Glasgow
G1 3BX, 7 for 7.30pm. Menu and booking form available at
Society meetings.
Speakers: Turtlewatch Cyprus and Tobago:
Sofie Rogers and Laura Seaton.

EXCURSION REPORTS

Bings, Birds and Botany, 23rd June 2009

John Lyth

Six people attended the outing to the old Nackerty Pit site (closed in 1934), near Newlands Glen, off Aitkenhead Road, Tannochside, at NS 703625. The weather was glorious, bright and sunny, and from the top of the bing we could see the Campsies.

A striking feature of the bing is the number of species of leguminosae. A total of fourteen species were found.

Birds seen included two pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*), a Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), and a female Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citronella*).

Note from Editor: John provided some printouts of photographs showing the party at the top of the bing, and two plant photographs – White Melilot (*Melilotus alba*) and Ribbed Melilot (*Melilotus officinalis*). Unfortunately they could not be printed at sufficiently good quality for reproduction in the Newsletter. Perhaps we will see them at the members' photographic evening.

The list of species discovered was as follows:

Fabaceae (Leguminosae)

Latin Name

English Name

<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medick
<i>Melilotus alba</i>	White Melilot
<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	Ribbed Melilot
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover
<i>Trifolium hybridum</i> <i>hyb.</i>	Alsike Clover
<i>Trifolium</i> <i>hyb. Elegans</i>	Alsike Clover
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White Clover
<i>Trifolium campestre</i>	Hop Trefoil
<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser Yellow Trefoil
<i>Vicia hirsute</i>	Hairy Tare
<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Tufted Vetch
<i>Vicia sepium</i>	Bush Vetch
<i>Vicia sativa sagetalis</i>	Common Vetch
<i>Lathyrus pratense</i>	Yellow Meadow Vetchling

Latin Name	English Name
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow Buttercup
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	Cuckoo Flower
<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>	Dames Violet
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	Shepherd's Purse
<i>Reseda luteola</i>	Dyer's Rocket
<i>Silene dioica</i>	Red Campion
<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>	Ragged Robin
<i>Stellaria sp</i>	
<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	Common Pearlwort
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb Robert
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore
<i>Potentilla sterilis</i>	Barren Strawberry
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Sloe, Blackthorn
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	Raspberry
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Brambles
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Dog Rose
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Common Hawthorn
<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>	Rose Bay Willow Herb
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Ground Elder or Bishop's Weed
<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>	Sweet Cicely
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder
<i>Cruciata laevipes</i>	Crosswort
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy
<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>	Ox-eye Daisy
<i>Triplospermum maritimum</i>	Scentsless Chamomile
<i>Artemesia vulgans</i>	Mugwort
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Coltsfoot
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Senecio jacobea</i>	Ragwort
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Knapweed
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipple-wort
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Dandelion
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sowthistle
<i>Symphytum officinale</i>	Comfrey
<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>	Common Forget-me-not
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Self-heal
<i>Plantago major</i>	Plantain
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Curled Dock
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch

On Saturday 28th March a group of 12 paid a short but sunny visit to Benmore. My attention was taken by the Garden's notice board description placed beneath a mature Western Hemlock. This ran along the same lines as my description in an earlier Newsletter, also gleaned from an official notice board, but this time seen in Namibia, and of the *Colophospermum Mopane*.

I quote below, adding a brief note from Wikipedia's observations upon this magnificent tree which has such tiny but perfectly formed cones.

The Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) is the state tree of Washington State on the western seaboard of the USA

"Ranging from Alaska to California, hemlocks in their native habitat reach an average of 60 m (200 ft.) Hemlock was an important natural material for the Native American population, particularly the Tlingit people. They used the bark as a facial cosmetic, hair remover and as a red dye to colour mountain goat wool. Fishing hooks were fashioned from the circular grained wood found in the knots. The branches were used to collect herring spawn – they would be placed in estuaries, where the herring would lay their eggs amongst the twigs, ready for harvesting by hungry humans."

Wikipedia tells us that tender new growth needles (leaves) can be chewed directly or made into a bitter tea, rich in vitamin C (similar to some other hemlock and pine species).

Outside of its native range, Western Hemlock is of importance in forestry for timber and paper production, and as an ornamental tree in large gardens, in northwest Europe and southern New Zealand. It is naturalised in some parts of Britain and New Zealand, though not so extensively as to be considered an invasive weed tree.

Gartlea Farm, June 27th 2009

Jane Christie

Ten members turned up on a cloudy, warm day. My daughter, Janet, who farms Gartlea, went with us on the walk, and gave us an insight into the way she manages the sheep and grazing with an emphasis on conservation as well as profitability.

In the wetland habitat we found Large Red, Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies, and also a hybrid of Scottish Dock (*Rumex aquaticus*). There were Peacock larvae on Nettles and Ringlet, Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillaries and Green-Veined White butterflies near the ponds. Other insects included an eleven-spot Ladybird and a large emerald moth in the Birch wood.

The herb-rich pasture was poorer this year due to grazing, but the Whorled Caraway was flourishing.

In January 1993 I wrote in this Newsletter about my experiences with Bingham's Pond. Living a short distance away in Hyndland, the pond was a regular destination for me together with my Dog – Lai.

At that time the pond, which had once been a popular skating and boating area, was a somewhat sterile affair with little vegetation. To quote from what I wrote about it in '93 "... a somewhat sterile boating area, containing a few small fish, many pieces of Parks Department furniture, plastic bags, tin cans and, in summer, eight or so rowing boats for hire...edged with bricks which are gradually being uprooted by vandals and thrown in ..."It played host to about a hundred mute swans who subsisted on a variety of totally unsuitable bread-based products – anything from hard dry mouldy white bread, to soft sandwiches made from peanut butter and sultanas, which an elderly lady insisted were good for them. This huge number of swans meant that the footpath on their favourite resting and grooming ground was coated with droppings, resulting in a foul slippery passage around that section of the pond. Not all the food was eaten so there was a resident rat population, and a contingent of Glasgow pigeons together with hundreds of black-headed gulls who mobbed the swans, swooping in to rob them of bread as it was thrown.

But this somewhat distasteful picture was not the full story. There was a resident heron, mallard ducks which successfully raised a percentage of their families, and in winter a delightful small flock of tufted duck, as well as visiting cormorants. These visitors must have virtually wiped the pond clean of any tiny fish, and there were certainly no suitable waterweeds for the swans, which in winter were joined by the occasional whooper.

What a change! On Sunday 5th July 2009 a visit was arranged to see the pond in its new incarnation. As part of the Pond Naturalisation Project enhancing old boating ponds, a scheme had been evolved and carried forward in consultation with the local Community Council. Chaired by the local councillor, a steering committee worked successfully to raise funding with the support of Glasgow City Council (Land Services), Land Trust, Kelvin Clyde Greenspace, Scottish Natural Heritage, the West End Area Committee and SEPA. The resultant extremely ambitious project has totally transformed the area.

Was it really the same site? Gone the hard sterile edges, to be replaced with wildlife planting into banks that had been carefully crafted to give just the correct rake of shelf and depth of water. Two islands had been constructed with the same graduated margins to encourage the already colourful planting. These words make the operation sound simple, but when one realises that 3,500 tons of bottoming were used together with 1,500 tons of subsoil and 400 sq.m. of geotextile, the scale of the project, with a relatively small number of personnel to carry it out, becomes only too apparent.

Over 7,000 plants of over twenty species were planted. Wildflower mixes were seeded on the islands and the edge of the pond above the water level.

Sheila Russell, who is an ecologist with Land and Environmental Services (Conservation) described how, in February 2003, at the start of this operation, the water level was lowered. As a result many of the waterbirds flew off. The remaining fifty-five swans were rounded up with help from staff of Glasgow City Council and Hesselhead Wildlife Rescue centre, together with volunteers, and transferred to Hogganfield Loch. Not a simple operation. Sheila described how she was afraid that on returning to Bingham's she would find that many of the swans had flown to arrive back before her. But, no, they obviously realised on which side their bread was buttered, so to speak, recognising immediately that the well-established regime of barley-feeding at Hogganfield was considerably more nourishing than stale bread. On naturalisation, one of the islands was adopted by a pair of swans and in 2004 they raised five young. The presence of this family ensured that any other swans were chased off, thereby leaving the water clear for a number of coot, moorhen, tufted and the mallards whose young we watched with great pleasure. Sheila described how a special frog ramp had been installed, and we were delighted to report seeing a tiny froglet as we made our way around the pond.

That the project has fulfilled its brief cannot be doubted, meeting several of the objectives and targets of Glasgow's Local Biodiversity habitat and species Action Plans. As well as the pond itself, development of the scrub/woodland in the N.W. corner is taking place, with the planting of understory and wildflower plugs. Bird and bat boxes have been installed, and there is provision for pond dipping – which was of course the reason for our afternoon meet.

Seventeen people, mostly from GNHS and armed with a variety of nets, took part. The object was to discover just how much life had found and made the pond home during the relatively short time since its completion.

In fine weather this was indeed a most satisfying and enjoyable afternoon.

My thanks to Sheila Russell for much of the information contained in this account.

Frog Chorus

Ian McCallum

A recent article by a wildlife journalist, Ally MacDonald, in the BBC wildlife magazine was about recording common frog mating chorus. She spoke of an annoying motor bike engine in the background which did not allow her to hear or record the night time mating calls. In desperation she delved into the BBC archives to listen to library recordings of frogs. Much to her surprise the common frog calls were like a motor bike in the distance! Armed with this information, I listened to the night time sounds emanating from my own pond - and sure enough I could hear the muted motor bike calls. On previous occasions I have listened for calls which would have been similar to the European frog calls. We live and learn!

Receiving future Newsletters by email will save the GNHS money in distribution costs, and allow you to see photos in glorious Technicolor! If you haven't already done so, please send the Society your email address - info@glasgownaturalhistory.org.uk and indicate that you wish to receive Newsletters by email. Thank you.

Five members accompanied Helen Cole and Paul Thompson of the National Trust for Scotland on a visit to the high level alpine areas of Ben Lawers.

The walk started along the nature trail, which passes through an area which has been fenced off for regeneration. Here we noted several interesting species including Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*), Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*), Yellow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga aizoides*) and Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*). We were also shown an area of Downy Willow (*Salix lapponum*) which has been introduced from Glen Lochy as part of a regeneration programme, and Viviparous Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca vivipara*), which is also used to assist regeneration.

Passing on to the open hillside, we saw Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) and also noted Alpine Bistort (*Persicaria vivipara*), Alpine Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum alpinum*), Scottish Asphodel (*Tofieldia pusilla*) and Starry Saxifrage (*Saxifraga stellaris*). However, much of the interest at this stage of the walk was not botanical, as the weather was fine and butterflies were on the wing. Mountain Ringlets were very active, and we also saw a Dark Green Fritillary and Small Heath. One member discovered an unusually inactive Viviparous Lizard, which allowed time for all to view it, and a number of Common Frogs were seen. In the sky, for those who could take a moment to look upwards, were a Buzzard and at least 16 Ravens in flight.

Beyond the col, we soon found more truly alpine species. The rarest of these were Alpine Mouse-ear (*Cerastium alpinum*) and the alpine form of Thyme-leaved speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa*), both larger and more showy than their nearest lowland relatives. Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*) and Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia* sp.) were also present.

After a stop for lunch, we continued to our main objective; the fragile schist crags of Ben Lawers itself. Here we left the path and walked in single file so as to minimise any damage to the vegetation. The first relative rarity we found was Sibbaldia (*Sibbaldia procumbens*), though this was not in flower. A few minutes later we were rewarded with our first sighting of the very rare and beautiful Alpine Forget-me-not (*Myosotis alpestris*), which we were later to see in great abundance all over the cliffs above us. Almost immediately there was great excitement as we began to find open flowers of the rarest and possibly the most beautiful of them all, the Alpine Gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*). This tiny flower only opens in sunshine and is almost impossible to spot otherwise, so we were very lucky to see it.

Not long afterwards, we were able to add four other rarities to the list – the intense blue flowers of Rock Speedwell (*Veronica fruticans*), the tiny Mountain Sandwort (*Minuartia rubella*), the pink flowers of Alpine Fleabane (*Erigeron borealis*), and the low-growing Net-leaved Willow (*Salix reticulata*).

Other alpines seen on the crags were Alpine Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla alpina*), Alpine Meadow-grass (*Poa alpina*), Cyphel (*Minuartia sedoides*), Dwarf Willow (*Salix herbacea*), Hoary Whitlowgrass (*Draba incana*), Holly-fern (*Polystichum lonchitis*), Moss Campion (*Silene acaulis*), Mountain Pansy (*Viola lutea*), Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*), Purple Saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*) and Roseroot (*Sedum rosea*).

As a very welcome bonus, we saw a Ring Ouzel flying to and fro, collecting food for its young.

On our return, we spotted one more rarity, the Three-flowered Rush (*Juncus triglumis*), a Willowherb which was either *Epilobium anagallidifolium* or *E. alsinifolium*, both of which are rather local in distribution, and back on the nature trail, our third clubmoss - Alpine Clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*).

We would like to thank all those of GNHS and NTS who made this excursion possible.

Footnote from Richard Weddle: three further members were conducted round the Nature Trail by Andrew Warwick (NTS) where we heard details of the work on propagating various species of willows, and juniper and saw many of the species listed above. Like the 'alpine' group we saw a Mountain Ringlet and Small Heath, also Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Blaeberry Bumblebee (*B. monticola*), Red-tailed Bumblebee (*B. lapidarius*) and a sexton beetle (*Nicrophorus sp.*) which escaped before we had a good look at it. More worryingly, we were also shown the fungus *Godronia cassandrae* a discomycete which attacks Blaeberry and can be devastating.



General Correspondence to the
General Secretary

Next Newsletter - copy to David
Palmar by 1st October please.

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

From the Reviews Editor

Bob Gray

***The History of Natural History (2nd Edition)*
Linnean Society**

2008

**Gavin Bridson
Hardback £65.00**

The author of this work was, for the decade ending 1980, librarian of the Linnean Society of London, the library and collections of which are basic resources for taxonomy and the history of biology. This annotated bibliography is the only one that encompasses the entire subject area and so is understandably large. It guides the enquirer directly and easily to the printed source by means of its comprehensive index of both subjects and names. The text is embellished with some fine photographs from obscure sources tracked down by Bridson of plant and animal material as well as of people and places intimately connected with the history of natural history.

***A Field Guide to the Geology of Madeira*
Geological Society of Glasgow**

2008

**C.J. Burton & J.G. MacDonald
Paperback £10**

The authors are highly experienced teachers of geology in the University of Glasgow. Their guide presents a clear picture of the volcanic and other geological phenomena that abound in Madeira, located in the Atlantic Ocean some 500 km north of the Canary Islands.

The contents include a brief summary of the natural and human history of the island and its geography as well as an introduction to igneous petrology and geochemistry. The geology is illustrated by means of seven itineraries that cover different areas of the island from coast to mountain tops. 24 colour plates demonstrate the many different aspects of the geology of the island.

***Freshwater Megaloptera and Neuroptera of Britain and Ireland* J.M. Elliott
Freshwater Biological Association**

2009

Softback £19.00

This is the 5th Edition of these keys to the seven aquatic species of Alder and Lacewing flies, among the most primitive of insects. The last edition has been out of print for some years. Apart from the keys to adults and larvae the 71 page book also possesses sections on collection and preservation methods as well as details of the life cycles and ecology of the three genera involved, *Sialis*, *Osmylus* and *Sisyra*.

***Flower Hunters*
Oxford University Press**

2009

**M & J Gribben
paperback £9.99**

The story of these botanical explorers is told chronologically, starting with the 17th century John Ray, arguably the botanical equivalent of Isaac Newton. The bulk of the text is devoted to the lives of eleven explorers from the early 18th to the early 20th Century, from Carl Linnaeus to Joseph Hooker. The book includes, as well as tales of adventure, details of the scientific and cultural value of the work of these plant collectors. The origin of so many plants that dominate our landscape and gardens is elucidated by the Gribbens, both visiting professors at the University of Sussex and the authors of several highly acclaimed works. This paperback contains many beautiful illustrations.

From Peat Bog to Conifer Forest
Packard Publishing Limited

2009

Ruth Tittensor
Paperback £27.50

This book is an oral history of the community and landscape of the area around Whitelee, south of Eaglesham and west of Strathaven. The period covered runs from 1900, when only about 5% of Scotland was tree covered, to the present day. Considerable afforestation has taken place in order to meet the country's timber requirements and the Whitelee plateau was one of the areas thus developed. The Whitelee Forest Oral History Project is therefore a case study into the effects of such planting on the people, habitats and environment of a site that is representative of Scotland as a whole. The author, who ran the project for the Forestry Commission, is a well qualified and widely travelled ecologist and landscape historian. The recent opening of the Whitelee wind farm makes this book particularly relevant.

The Emerald Planet
Oxford University Press

2007 Hardback £14.99

David Beerling
2008 Paperback £8.99

470 million years ago, when plants first invaded the land, to the present day is the period covered in this book. The evolution of plants is interrelated with the evolution of animals and the environment, particularly through the medium of photosynthesis and therefore gas exchange. The author investigates the history of our knowledge of these matters, focusing on fossils and their finders, Victorian experimental scientists and modern analytical methods and discoveries that shed new light on the importance of plant life in the evolution of planet Earth. It is an important book in the climate change debate. The author is Professor of Palaeoclimatology at the University of Sheffield.

Notebooks from New Guinea
Oxford University Press

2009

V. Novotny
Hardback £16.99

One of the world's leading tropical biologists, the author researches herbivorous insects and their host plants in the tropical rainforests of Papua New Guinea where he runs a research station with the aid of local people. He contrasts the local tribespeople with those of his native Bohemia as well as describing the natural history of and his research into the rainforest. Vojtech Novotny is, amongst other things, Head of the Department of Ecology and Conservation Biology at the Biology Centre of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His essays are translated by David Short and illustrations are by a local Papua New Guinean artist.

Darwin's Island
Little, Brown

2009

Steve Jones
Hardback £20

Whereas Darwin spent only five weeks on the Galapagos, he spent 40 years in Britain, investigating and writing papers on a widespread array of topics related to the plants, animals and people found on these islands. In this book Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics at University College London and author of the bestselling '*Almost Like a Whale*', analyses and summarises much of Darwin's prodigious output on diverse matters such as orchids, insectivorous plants, earthworms, barnacles, dogs, apes and human emotions, wherein he created the basis for much of modern biology. This is a most appropriate text on the bicentenary of Darwin's birth and 150th anniversary of the publication of '*On the Origin of Species*'.

GNHS Christmas Dinner Menu

Cafe Connect, 348 Cathedral St, Glasgow G1 3BX

December 8th 2009, 7pm for 7.30pm

£22 per head

Apple and Parsnip Soup
Crispy Peppered Chicken Strips
served with chunky tomato salsa

Bruschetta
Italian bread topped with tomato and basil with mozzarella

Smoked Fish Pie
smoked fish in a cream sauce topped with mashed potatoes

Rib-Eye Steak
served with mushroom and brandy jus

Penne Pasta
with chicken and bacon in a rich tomato sauce

Vegetarian option on request
all served with seasonal potatoes and vegetables

Cranachan
fresh raspberries layered with honey, oats and whisky cream

Warm Apple Tart
served with cinnamon cream

Profiteroles
homemade, filled with Chantilly cream drizzled in chocolate sauce

Printouts of this menu and a booking form will be available at the lectures, to allow you to make your choice and keep a copy for yourself.