



# GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November 2007

Newsletter Editor  
David Palmar

Next Newsletter Deadline  
12 January 2007

GNHS is a Registered Scottish  
Charity Web-site:

[http://www.  
glasgownaturalhistory.org.uk/](http://www.glasgownaturalhistory.org.uk/)

## FORTHCOMING GNHS MEETINGS September – December 2007

Meetings in University of Glasgow, Graham Kerr Building, unless otherwise stated

**November Wed 14th 5.00pm in Graham Kerr** BLB Lecture - When evolution and ecology meet: long term studies of red deer and Soay sheep in the Hebrides - Professor Josephine Pemberton

**NOTE time and day of week**

**December Tues 11th 7.15pm** Buffet dinner will be held in the Zoology Museum, Graham Kerr Building  
Guest speaker Junella McKay - Antarctic spring 2006  
Please fill in form on last page and send to Morag Mackinnon.

## GNHS SUBSCRIPTION 2008

Subscriptions fall due for renewal on January 1st. For those who don't pay by standing order, a renewal form accompanies the Newsletter. There is a discount of £1 for renewing before January 31st 2008.

## SILENT SPRING - and SUMMER? 3 July 2007

**Norman Grist**

In 1963 Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" sounded the alarm about the adverse effect on birds of widespread and growing overuse of pesticides on their basic food-chain. Other changes in farming practice added to the problem. Here in Hyndland the dawn chorus has been a constant and pleasing delight in early mornings - until now! Only in 2004 did I record numbers of birds heard from our bedroom windows from about 0630 to 0700 hrs. The results (below) were unsurprising and I did not bother to repeat the counts this year. This I regret because we only recently realised that we no longer remember hearing the usual chorus these days - not quite "silent" but much reduced. I must count again in 2008.

During the day we now have a few visits from tits (mainly Coal tits), occasional finches, singing Wrens and Dunnocks, Feral Pigeons, occasional Wood-Pigeons and rarely a brief visit by one or two Collared doves, very few Blackbirds (decimated

by cats), groups of Magpies and occasional Carrion Crows. Sparrows are long gone, with just a few occasional Starlings nearby - but not at Hyndland Court itself.

Swifts returned to south Britain as usual this year, but here they were few and arrived late, perhaps another sign of decline. Their different food base ("aerial plankton"), also originates at ground level.

### **Dawn Chorus Birdsong species: Numbers heard at Hyndland Court, 2004**

	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>
<b>Wren</b>	8	14	10	9
<b>Robin</b>	8	8	0	0
<b>Blackbird</b>	3	0	9	5
<b>Great tit</b>	3	0	0	0
<b>Blue tit</b>	2	0	0	0
<b>Chaffinch</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Magpie</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Dunnock</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Greenfinch</b>	0	1	0	0
<b>Wood pigeon</b>	0	1	0	0
<b>Total species</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

Of other wildlife, Lesser celandines emerged here on time this year but flowered poorly, and our usual native *Dactylorhiza* orchids that multiplied and flourished so well for over 10 years in undisturbed planters on our patio have been slow this year, pale and puny (only five flower spikes) instead of the usual big, numerous and well coloured flowers in recent years.

We still have foxes and squirrels, but see foxes less often - perhaps because a neighbouring garden has been "tidied" and the den dug up. Instead we now hear of rats (prey for foxes). Our population of domestic cats has increased, including some known and seen efficient hunters of birds.

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We live in hope!

### **FEROCIOUS ASIAN TIGER MOSQUITO REACHES BRITAIN (The Daily Telegraph August 21, 2007)**

**Norman Grist**

It took longer to arrive here than I expected in 1996 when preparing my Presidential Address "Yellow Jack and Flying Tigers" (unpublished) to our Society.

*Aedes albopictus* is a mosquito vector of Dengue fever, West Nile fever (which reached the American continent for the first time recently) *Chicungunya* (another "tropical" virus causing painful fevers and reported from Italy this year) and many other "arboviruses" and other parasites. The special novelty of *A. albopictus* was

its ability to survive and develop within rain puddles in old car tyres. For these there is value and demand with international traffic in container ships from East Asia. Old tyres are used for retreading or other purposes in countries with lower standards of acceptability for legal use on road vehicles. This spread them worldwide.

In America the "Tiger" spread north and westwards, breeding in tyre dumps, on the way picking up West Nile virus (itself a recent import into America), becoming a concern for blood transfusions and unborn human babies. It reached Chicago surprisingly quickly and survived harsh winter. These are examples of the continuing spread of parasitic life forms that flourish even in our sophisticated modern societies, able to exploit unexpected opportunities provided by modern human communities and lifestyles - including world travel. Evolution is still in progress - our humble selves included. Alert vigilance is required for these as well as suicide bombers.

NB The reporter of *A. albopictus* in Cheltenham described its markings wrongly as "yellow". They are conspicuously white - hence the name: albo = white; pictus = painted. Pinned specimens were shown to GNHS members by Geoff Hancock and myself.

## **FORTHCOMING GNHS EXCURSIONS**

### **An apology**

**Richard Sutcliffe**

I had planned to lead an excursion in August to the Falls of Clyde to look for Purple Hairstreak butterflies. Unfortunately I missed the deadline for the Newsletter to tell everyone what the date and arrangements were going to be. As it happened, the weekend I had planned was wet and I would probably have cancelled it, as we wouldn't have seen anything anyway! I am planning to try again next August.

## **PREVIOUS EXCURSION NOTES**

### **Pollok Woodland Garden, 24th May 2007**

**Bob Gray**

Eleven members attended this combined meeting with the Glasgow Tree Lovers' Society.

We welcomed Ian Boyd, a Pollok Park ranger who came round with us. Members were provided with an annotated map and sequential tree list so that we could follow the tree trail in some sort of order. The immediate aim was to confirm the identity of the many trees in this part of Pollok estate next to the house and to draw the attention of members to the remarkable history behind some of the trees here. The longer term objective is accurately to map the location and note the size of these trees.

This is not the place to list all of the specimens found, but attention may be drawn to the highlights of the evening. Firstly, however, it is interesting to note that, despite the fact that Sir John Maxwell Stirling, 10th baronet and previous owner of the property, was a founder member of the Forestry Commission and its chairman

from 1922-32, the bulk of this woodland garden consists of deciduous rather than coniferous trees, which were so widely planted by the Commission, especially in its early days. The 7th baronet is thought to have carried out major plantings in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Oak trees figured prominently in our tour. Particularly attractive were some splendid specimens of Hungarian oak (*Quercus frainetto*), "the queen of oaks". We saw many examples of Turner's oak (*Q. x turneri*), a hybrid of the Holm oak (*Q. ilex*) and English oak (*Q. robur*). A huge specimen, grafted at ground level on to *Q. robur*, was found near the house. It is thought to be a Lucombe oak (*Q. x lucombeana*). Another large specimen was probably a Roble southern beech (*Nothofagus obliqua*) but these last two have yet to be verified.

The most famous tree in the garden is a massive Beech tree (*Fagus sylvatica*), thought to be about 250 years old, which measures 7.36 m at 0.4 m. This is one of Scotland's heritage trees, the only one in Glasgow of 100 Scottish trees that were selected by the Forestry Commission in 2002 as part of that year's 'Treefest' celebrations. Of great interest to the writer was the discovery of a broad-leaved lime seedling (*Tilia platyphyllos*), the first this year to be discovered south of the River Clyde in Glasgow.

The climax of the evening, however, was the appearance of the 'handkerchiefs' of the Dove tree (*Davidia involucreta*) caught in the orange light of the setting sun. Some of these bracts flickered to earth in a ghostly fashion as we looked on. The trail currently contains 72 trees.

## **South Ayrshire Weekend, 16-17th June 2007**

**Bob Gray**

During this weekend we visited two estates in South Ayrshire as well as two nature reserves.

Mr. Pat Hunter Blair of Blairquhan, near Straiton, kindly met us on Saturday morning when we were treated to a tea in the dining room of the William Burn designed mansion house, most memorable because at 10 O'clock the clocks chimed and conversation ceased. Pat himself took us round the pinetum and walled garden and posed for us various challenging tree identifications, but not before we had measured the girth of the castle gallows ("dool") tree, a sycamore, which at 18'7" showed an increase of 4" in the 14 years since a previous measurement. This tree, calculated to have been planted in about 1600, is one of Scotland's "Heritage Trees", an inventory of the country's 100 most exceptional trees drawn up by Forestry Commission Scotland in 2002. The first challenging tree identification turned out to be a Hornbeam-leaved maple (*Acer carpinifolium*).

Unusually, the estate possesses both a pinetum and an arboretum, but time permitted us to visit the former only. Located beside a sizeable pond it contains too many specimens to list here but amongst the finest are a giant sequoia (planted in 1856, the year of its introduction to the UK), Chile pine, Nikko fir, Douglas fir, Western red cedar and Leyland's cypress. One of the more unusual is a Prince Albert's yew (*Saxegothaea conspicua*). The gardens were laid out by John Tweedie, a Lanarkshire native who became famous as both a gardener and botanist. The glasshouse was built in 1820. The walled garden possesses only

three walls, as rising ground on the south side provides shelter from that direction. The fine laburnum walk had only recently shed its yellow petals.

Before our departure we were privileged to view a number of wonderful sketches drawn by Eliza Hunter Blair in 1820's India, displayed in two of the castle's rooms. We lunched in an open hut on the banks of a small but atmospheric fishing loch. Then we stopped by the banks of the River Girvan on our way out of the estate and found a great quantity of natural regeneration of different species indicating how well adapted are many exotic species to our climate. Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) regeneration was particularly abundant and shows signs of becoming dominant without careful management.

In the afternoon we went to part of Kilkerran estate, the home of Sir Charles Fergusson. The Ladyburn entrance is flanked by some large conifers, Giant sequoia, Giant fir and Noble fir. Outside the massive walled garden, now a caravan site, we found a huge lime tree whose girth we measured with difficulty owing to the large number of epicormic shoots. From there we followed a woodland path, crossed a burn and climbed a slope to reach the summit of "Fairy Knowe", a hillock surmounted by a group of characterful old specimen trees of European larch, Norway spruce, Beech, Oak and Spanish chestnut, all planted in about 1800. It was thought that the giant silver firs (probably *Abies alba*) below the knowe had been planted in 1707 in order to celebrate the Union of the Parliaments - one of the reasons we had for visiting this estate - but we were assured by Jenny Fergusson that they had been felled some 50 years ago.

On Sunday morning we went to Auchalton Meadows, a lime rich SWT reserve. The site is located on the remains of an early 19th Century limestone quarry and lime kilns, where the resulting alkaline soil has encouraged the growth of an orchid rich grassland. Thanks to Pam Murdoch's expertise we were able to identify common spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and fragrant orchids (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), typical of lime, as well as the greater spotted butterfly (*Platanthera chlorantha*) and common twayblade (*Listera ovata*) that were locally abundant.

The afternoon saw us at Failford, walking through part of the Ayr gorge woodlands, another SWT reserve. The soils are derived from Mauchline new red sandstone, readily visible on the riverbanks, which is some 300 million years old (late Carboniferous/early Permian). The rock consists of well rounded, wind blown sand grains; it lacks coarse pebbles and demonstrates cross bedding typical of modern sand dunes. This rock was laid down when conditions were desert-like, at a time when, in other parts of the world, the first forests of conifers were evolving. The woods consist of old Sessile oak and Ash with Birch and Hazel. Here are to be found many true Sessile oak trees, whose characteristics contrast with those of the Common oak and hybrids between the two that are often encountered on field trips. The native woodlands have been interplanted with introduced Silver firs and Spruces but natural regeneration of the native species and controlled felling of the introduced trees will ensure the continuation of this remarkable area of ancient woodland (woodland having a continuous existence since before 1750 is "ancient").

All the sites visited during the course of this weekend could well repay further visits. Blairquhan in particular comes highly recommended, although you may not be fortunate enough to enjoy cream tea with the laird in his drawing room.

The visit to Bellahouston, one of Glasgow's five city parks, was marred by damp weather but it cleared sufficiently for an enlightening walk around one of the largest parks in the city, 71 ha (175 acres) in extent. The main part of the park was acquired by the city in 1895 and extended six years later by the purchase of part of Dumbreck Lands from Sir John Maxwell. In 1903 Ibroxhill was added.

Geologically the main feature of the park is Ibroxhill itself, which is a drumlin, part of the 'basket of eggs' drumlin swarm left in the Glasgow area by the retreat of the ice sheet some 12,000 years ago. Like others this drumlin tapers from northwest to southeast and is about 1 km long and 30 m high, parallel to the River Clyde. The glacial drift material of sands and gravels has given rise to soils that are well drained.

A great contrast exists in the arrangement of the park trees. Woodlands on the north facing slope of Ibroxhill consist mainly of Japanese larch and Norway spruce with an admixture of Lodgepole pine and firebreaks of hardwoods such as willows, Oak and Beech. In the lower, flatter areas of the park can be seen good avenues of London plane and Lime trees as well as rows of Whitebeam ('Wilfrid Fox') and Fastigate hornbeam. Rows of purple-leaved variants of various species such as Beech, Sycamore and Maple are a spectacular feature. Many hornbeams are found in the park in addition to a number of different limes, not just the common lime, *Tilia x europaea*, but also broad-leaved *T. platyphyllos*, small-leaved *T. cordata*, Crimean *T. x euchlora* and Oliver's *T. oliveri* from central China.

The most outstanding feature of the park for those interested in trees is undoubtedly the individual trees to be observed above the ski slope, towards the hill top. A magnificent Mirbeck's oak (*Quercus canariensis*), with large, glossy convex leaves having small lobes, is arguably the most unusual specimen here. A few examples can be found of the Mexican white pine, *Pinus ayacahuite*, with its bark cracking into squares and many long, tapering, resinous cones having outwardly curving basal scales. In addition are fine examples of the Colorado white fir, *Abies concolor* f. *violacea*, which has very grey foliage, and Serbian spruce, *Picea omorika*, with its pagoda shape and needles, unlike other European spruces, being flat with two white bands underneath. Furthermore we found side by side two specimens of Lawson's cypress, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* and Western red cedar, *Thuja plicata*, thus enabling the differences between them to be clearly exhibited.

Bellahouston park, the site of the famous 1938 Empire exhibition and the Charles Rennie Mackintosh House of an Art Lover built in 1996, is well worth a visit for many reasons apart from its trees and the commanding views of the city afforded by Ibroxhill. The walled garden has a fine collection of ferns and daffodils gathered by the 19th Century plant collector, Peter Barr, who lived locally, in addition to well cared for shrubs, herbaceous perennials and annual borders.

## **Plean Country Park, 3rd July 2007**

**Edna Stewart**

The date of this outing was changed from that in the original programme, which probably resulted in no enquiries. So I enlisted a friend and we drove to the park on a beautiful sunny day - yes, there was one this summer - and counted about a thousand Greater Butterfly Orchids in the main meadow in front of the ruined house. We also tried to measure the length of the spur of 20 GBOs, but gave up after doing 10 due to the biting clegs. This measurement is one of the ways of separating Greater Butterfly Orchids from Lesser Butterfly Orchids. There were also GBOs in the meadow nearer the car park, where tree planting has taken place at the edges.

## **Mugdock Country Park, 21st July 2007**

**Edna Stewart**

Eight members met at the South Lodge Car Park. We turned left when the track branched, and soon reached the flowery meadow. There were at least 50 different species of flowering plants, mostly common, but we were delighted to find about 20 Greater Butterfly Orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*). We continued round past Mugdock Castle where we noticed Fairy Foxglove (*Erinus alpinus*) and Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) on the walls. Then across the duckboards of the marsh leading to the far side of the loch, where we noted several plants of that habitat such as Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*).

Most people departed after a picnic lunch under the trees above the East Car Park, but two of us continued our walk over Peich's Muir. This has a small stretch of acid bog, with a bright display of Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Common Cotton-sedge (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). On a drier patch was a colourful display of Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*), and near the track a single Greater Butterfly Orchid.

Mugdock Country Park contains a variety of habitats including the wood which would be worth visiting in spring and Drumclog Moor, which is good for fungi.

## **Greenhead Moss, 25th July 2007**

**Peter Macpherson**

A botanical field meeting was held on the evening of 25th July with an attendance of six. The rendezvous was Bartonhall Road, Waterloo. Most people are surprised to learn that we have a Waterloo in Lanarkshire!

The area in which recording took place (NS 80 & 8154) had been peat moss (of which there is a substantial remnant), altered by peat extraction, open cast and deep coal mining and landfill operations. In 1996 a planning enquiry into proposals for further open cast and landfill attracted vigorous opposition from the local community. Consent was refused and North Lanarkshire Council acquired the site in 1999, the starting point for the creation of the Greenhead Moss Community Nature Park. Access paths have been constructed, primarily for the benefit of the local community.

The area is now mostly rough grassland in which there are two ponds.

We recorded 111 different plant taxa. There were 11 species of grass of which the most interesting was the alien Californian Brome (*Ceratochloa carinata*), seen about two yards from a path, only the second record for Lanarkshire and so far recorded in only five other Scottish vice-counties. Twelve species were noted in relation to marsh or pond, with the remainder in the grassland or path sides.

In addition, we came across a hollow in which there was a conglomerate of 13 attractive native and alien plants. We quickly realised that this must have been the result of sowing a seed mixture and then found a weathered empty packet as proof. The natives were: Red Campion (*Silene dioica*), White Campion (*Silene latifolia*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), Corn Marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*), Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*), Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*), Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*). In the alien category were: Perennial Cornflower (*Centaurea montana*), 'Soft' Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*), Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) and a Globe Thistle (*Echinops* spp.). The find evoked interest, but they have not been added to the records.

### **THANK YOU**

The Newsletter Editor would like to express his thanks for all the contributions in the Newsletter. It is only because so many people have contributed so much yet again that the Newsletter can be filled regularly with such interesting accounts.

### **Next Newsletter deadline 12th January please, to allow time for a newsletter before the AGM.**

Newsletter contributions are welcomed from all members, and should be sent by 12th January, preferably to the email address below, in plain text, i.e. the ordinary text of the email is best, or a .txt file or a Word document with either **no special formatting applied, or please use the font Verdana, point size 12**, and italicise scientific names please.

If you type it on a computer, please don't print it out, as I would have to retype it – give it to me on a floppy disc instead!

Thank you David Palmar, Newsletter Editor