



BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

Issue No 61 April 2006

ISSN 0966-1964

Recorder News

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these that cause us any problems is tiny so most of them can be considered to be on our side in the ecological war.

Even with that restriction they are enormously diverse: from giant daddy-long-legs to tiny midges, from brilliantly coloured hoverflies and soldierflies to 'little black jobs' like the scuttle flies, with a host of pretty bizarre creatures amongst them. They are also ubiquitous except in the sea: from the intertidal zone to the highest tops and in every habitat between. They play a major role in the ecology of many habitats and that by itself is a good reason to get to know some of them. And some of the minor roles are pretty weird: one species has larvae that prey on acorn barnacles on the shore; another pursues bumblebees and lays eggs on them in flight, to become internal parasites.



Conopid fly *Conops quadrifasciata*
from *Flies of the British Isles* by Colyer & Hammond

WATCH YOUR FLIES!

By Gordon Corbet

Flies have a bad public image – they bite us, they get in our eyes, they carry disease, they eat our crops and drive our livestock mad. But let us get them into perspective. Firstly I am writing here about two-winged flies, order Diptera. So leaving out sawflies, mayflies, caddis flies and all sorts of other four-winged 'flies': that narrows it down to a mere 6668 species in Britain! That is the number in the 1998 checklist, and the total is growing fast. The proportion of

When I adopted the Scottish Wildlife Trust's reserve at Dumbarrie Links in Fife as my 'local patch' in 1999 – just seven hectares of dunes and dune grassland – my first priority was to get to know the common, dominant species (plants and animals). Since the reserve includes a strip of tideline, seaweed flies are abundant and that was where I started on the Diptera.

Continued on page 3

Notes from the Chair

In theory, winter is behind us and we are now into British Summer Time. Last week's brief interlude of snow onto the lower ground was lovely whilst the sun shone, but as the ground is now an'orrible muddy mass it is a good excuse to retreat inside and do some desk work.



Desk work has continued on the BRISC front with a great deal of work having been put into the now completed draft Business Plan 2006 – 2016 which was sent out to all Members. Can I please urge you to read it and let us have any comments? We did not print the Appendices as it meant considerably more paper, collating time and cost of postage but the joy of the internet is such that you can access all of these easily and see the whole picture. In particular the detailed budget will provide much meat compared to the summary provided. Your comments, or even an acknowledgement that you have seen it, will provide the Committee with the assurance that it is a sound basis on which to go forward over the next ten years.

Jon Mercer has been putting together our AGM and Conference – which may have passed by the time you read this. However, there is another conference to bring to your attention: The National Federation for Biological Recording has their AGM and Conference on 5-6 May considering 'Biological Recording for the future'. An impressive line up of speakers but there is a distinct lack of participants to hear them! Worth looking at their website www.nfbr.org.uk

Claire McSorley now has a programme out for the events that she has organised under the Wildlife Counts Project. The events are located in North Lanarkshire, Stirling and Falkirk Council Areas and run to a total of twenty four days between mid April and the end of October, and if anyone could volunteer their time to assist with the days it would be very much appreciated. BRISC is committed to contributing to the costs of the project and one of the ways that we can do this is by providing time so, if you can help and do attend, please record your time and let Claire know. Craig Macadam has now taken on the Chairmanship of the Project Management Team from Anne-Marie Smout and our very sincere thanks to them both for their involvement here.

I have been south for a Council meeting of NFBR, but will be unable to attend their next one, and also for a meeting of the NBN Local Record Centres Steering Group. On the whole, these concern the administration aspects of the organisations and the taking forward of specific projects or policy issues. It always seems intriguing that there are these endless committees but surprisingly little to report back on. The truth is probably that it is a steady and relentless slog, nibbling away at issues, trying to influence policy, taking forward projects and that there is seldom any mind-blowing and dramatic piece of information to convey back; therefore you receive these bland statements about 'attended meeting for this or that' and must wonder what goes on!

Communication, or the lack of it, is always high on everyone's list of what needs to be sorted out, but unless one goes into the minutiae it is very difficult to give a full reflection of the discussion and the way that the discussion went. The minutes are normally available but how many read these and anyway they do not have space to reflect the whole discussion. I have on occasions tried to read Hansard on specific parliamentary debates but have invariably given up as it extends to so many pages. So, one is driven back to relying on things coming out in dribs and drabs and hoping that maybe a few words of wisdom have been put in by some committee

member along the line. I hope you can rely on me to put in a few words of wisdom on your behalf when I attend these meetings, but I do flounder around somewhat! I and the rest of the Committee are always very pleased to receive comments and views from Members; after all the committee representation is meant to be such that we do pick up all viewpoints from the Members.

Patrick Milne Home

Editorial

This issue introduces an exciting new series called "What is special about ..." where every new issue of *BRISC Recorder News* will focus on a different part of Scotland's wonderful biodiversity. Mark Pollitt makes a splendid start with his article about Dumfries and Galloway.

It is now time to take part in Springwatch, the network that records and monitors phenology. A postcard with details is enclosed here, and you can read more about it in Andrew Fairbairn's article. Also in this issue find out what NARRS stands for.

BRISC responded vigorously to the consultation regarding the closure of five out of nine Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) sites, expressing our dismay at the shortsightedness of the plan. The closure of Banchory will seriously impact on long term datasets in particular regarding seabirds and their food supply, and to close Monks Wood will have a massive impact on the entire future of recording in the UK, including on the development of the National Biodiversity Network. In spite of the huge volume of opposition to the closures (running into thousands), the original plan is going ahead. It seems to be the same old story: consultation is just a hoop that has to be gone through – not anything serious that might actually impact on the outcome. All rather depressing.

On a cheerier note, BRISC's Wildlife Counts project is going ahead at top speed. A leaflet with the extensive and wide-ranging programme is enclosed with this mailing and read more about it in Claire's announcement. If you can help, please contact Claire.

You should already have received BRISC's Strategic Business Plan 2006-2016 and also the Annual Report for 2005. Both will be on the agenda at the forthcoming AGM on 8 April, as part of our Annual Conference, this year on the theme of 'Wetland Recording and Monitoring'. It takes place at Tweed Horizons Centre, Newtown St Boswells, in the Scottish Borders. A really lovely location. See our website for further information.. AMS

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WEBSITE - For the Members Only web pages
use Username bombus
Password terrestris

‘Watch your flies!’ – continued from page 1

The seven common seaweed flies turned out to belong to four different families (there are 102 families of Diptera in Britain). Most of the seaweed flies are active in winter, which is actually not a bad time to start a study of flies – they can be found in sufficient numbers to keep you occupied without being overwhelmed by their abundance and variety. However, flies like the winter gnats and non-biting midges that form dancing swarms on mild winter days are not the easiest groups to get to grips with. So most people will prefer to start with the hoverflies and some of the other larger flies that are abundant pollinators of summer flowers.



Hoverfly *Episyrrhus balteatus* – This is partly migratory, sometimes in vast numbers and is one of the commonest species, present in practically every environment. photo AMS

Hoverflies and some others are covered in two well illustrated books published by the British Entomological and Natural History Society: *British hoverflies* by Stubbs & Falk (2002), with 271 species, and *British soldierflies and their allies* by Stubbs & Drake (2001), the latter dealing with a group of 11 families comprising 162 species. A similar book dealing with the crane flies is somewhere in the pipeline. Many other families are dealt with in the *Handbooks for the identification of British insects* published by the Royal Entomological Society of London, but there are still many gaps. Some of the older *Handbooks* are notoriously and unnecessarily difficult for the beginner (and that includes entomologists experienced in other groups), but there is now a link with the Field Studies Council to get draft keys tested by users with different levels of experience, so they are steadily becoming more user-friendly. Some 10km BRC atlases are also available, for hoverflies, crane flies, soldierflies etc. and a few smaller families. These show the paucity of records in many parts of Scotland, especially in the lowlands, which tend to be overlooked by southern entomologists heading for the classical hot spots of Rannoch and Strathspey. A fund of very practical, user-friendly information is provided in *A dipterist's handbook*, edited by Stubbs & Chandler and published by the Amateur Entomologists' Society (1978, 1996).

Last summer I used water traps on the reserve for a few days. Most of the catch consisted of species I had already found by other means – by sweep-netting or on flowers – but there was one species that turned out to belong to a family, Tethinidae, that I had never heard of, apparently with no previous Scottish records.

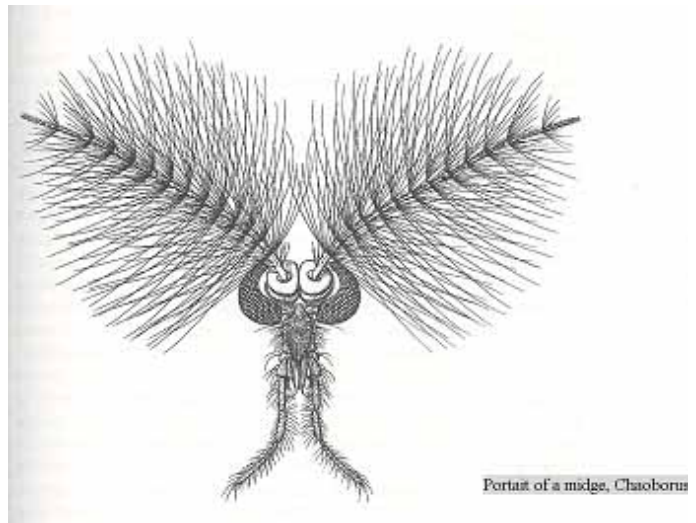
The most satisfying method of recording is to rear flies from larvae since that is the growing stage, which defines the habitat requirement and ecological niche of the species. For many species the larvae are still unknown.



The large handsome hoverfly *Helophilus pendulus* photo AMS

So there is plenty scope for novel discoveries. So far at Dumbarrie Links I have found about ten species that appear not to have been recorded previously in Scotland. The total there stands at about 330 species and steadily rising, which might sound impressive until you read that about 2000 species have been found at Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire (albeit after years of recording by specialists). There are times when I feel glad that Scotland has an impoverished fauna!

Gordon Corbet



Portrait of a midge *Chaoborus*
illustration from H. Oldroyd's *Natural History of Flies*

What's special about ...

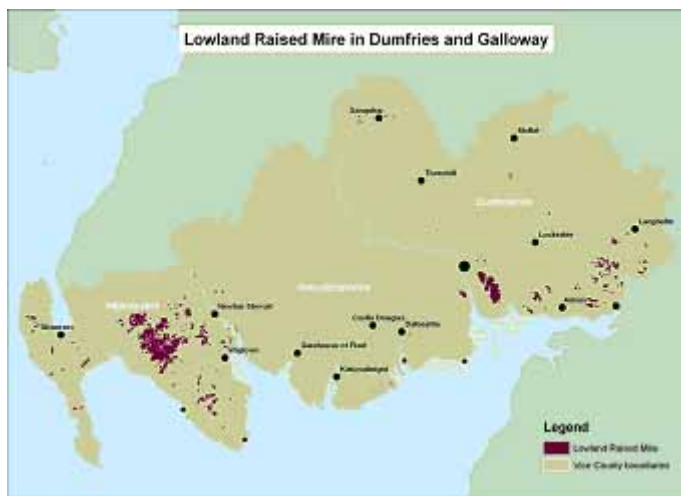
Dumfries and Galloway – by Mark Pollitt

Dumfries and Galloway occupies approximately 6,500km² of south-west Scotland. Bypassed by many travelling to more 'glamorous' destinations to the north and south, the region hosts a diverse range of habitats from upland to estuary. The Southern Uplands stretch east-west across the region, giving rise to the major rivers of the Bladnoch, Dee, Annan, Esk, Nith and Cree, which run



Carstramon Wood SWT Reserve

north-south towards the Solway Firth. For parts of their length the latter two rivers form the dividing lines between the region's three vice-counties: Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire. The lowland landscape of Dumfries and Galloway is dominated by dairy cattle grazing, much of it extensive, with relatively small areas of arable land. To the north of the region, on the higher ground, there are extensive areas of hill farming. Aside from agriculture, the predominant land use is forestry, which covers around 26% of the land area, some 90% of which is coniferous plantation. Although unenlightened forestry planting practises in the past caused significant losses to some of the region's key habitats, there remains many habitat jewels spread throughout the region.



Lowland Raised Mires

A series of lowland raised bogs stretching along the north of the Solway provide important habitats holding specialities such as

bog rosemary *Andromeda polifolia* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos* and home to Scotland's only colony of bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera*. Sadly many of these bogs have fallen victim to conifer planting, though some, such as Carsegowan Moss SWT Reserve, remain relatively intact whilst others, such as Kirkconnel Flow National Nature Reserve (NNR), have undergone considerable restoration work to remove conifers and restore the water table. The region retains many excellent semi-natural ancient woodlands, those at Wood of Cree and Carstramon Wood being good examples. Despite forestry operations, large parts of the uplands remain extremely wild and remote – the Merrick Kells and the hills above Moffat and Langholm - and retain important plant and bird communities. The Solway Firth flanks most of the regions coastline, and provides a diverse range of habitats from merse and mudflats to coastal cliffs.



Solway Coast near Colvend

Flora and fauna

The wide variety of habitats in the region support a similarly wide array of species. Dumfries and Galloway holds an estimated 20% of the Scottish red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* population, perhaps one of the few species to have derived some benefit from the widespread coniferous plantings of the 20th century. The region is largely free of grey squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* although sightings continue to increase, particularly the Esk corridor in the east of the region. Work continues to develop appropriate long term management of woodland to favour red squirrels in core areas.

Although fewer in number, the region still hosts many characteristic Scottish bird species such as osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*. It is also at the northern limit for some species with more southerly ranges, including the only regular Scottish breeding population of nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Perhaps the region's most important bird species in an international context is the barnacle goose *Branta leucopsis*, with virtually the whole of the Svalbard-breeding population wintering along the shores of the Solway. The Solway Estuary, shared with north Cumbria, hosts 11 waterbird species in internationally important numbers and is of national importance for other waterbirds such as scaup *Aythya marila*.



Solway Coast near Colvend

As well as its importance for birds, the Solway coast is also important for its marine and coastal wildlife. Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* and turtle sightings are regular in the west of the region in the summer months and the shores support reefs of honeycomb worm *Sabellaria alveolata*. The Cree Estuary and river is one of only three Scottish sites for spurling *Osmerus eperlanus*, which migrate upstream to their spawning grounds each spring. Natterjack toads *Bufo calamita* reach the northern end of their range on the Solway and places such as Caerlaverock WWT reserve offer unique opportunities for anyone to see (or at least hear!) them.



Black Darter *Sympetrum danae*

Dragonflies are well represented throughout the region. Hairy dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* are known from four sites in the region whilst Silver Flowe NNR supports the most southerly population of azure hawkers *Aeshna caerulea* in Scotland. In recent years new records for several species, including migrant hawkers *Aeshna mixta*, southern hawkers *Aeshna cyanea* and emperor *Anax imperator* suggest northwards expansion of these species' range.

The diversity of habitats supports a vast array of plants with around 1800 species present across the three vice counties.

Species such as whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*, a species of damp grassland is regionally common given the abundance of areas of suitable habitat. Rarer plants also find a home, such as sticky catchfly *Lychnis viscaria* on the east Kirkcudbrightshire coast and the only Scottish colony of perennial flax *Linum perenne* at Brighthouse Bay. In the uplands, the moors and flushes are host to other specialities such as varnished hook-moss *Hamatacaulis vernicosus* and alpine foxtail *Alopecurus borealis*.

Recording

With a population of only 150,000 people the region has one of the lowest population densities in the country outside of the Highlands and Islands. Biological recording in the region has been, and indeed still is, the realm of a relatively small number of individuals, although some of these are extremely active and have contributed a huge amount of knowledge from their intensive efforts. Hence, although the area is under-recorded, the region does present any amateur or professional naturalist with ample opportunity to make new discoveries.



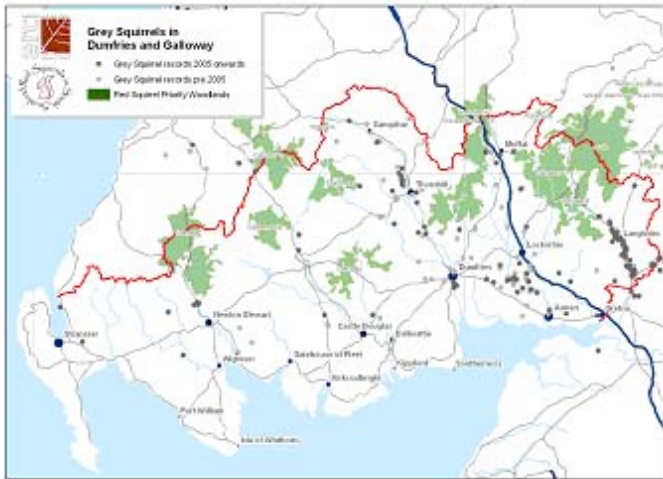
Nature Reserves

The region is unusual in that it has three small SOC groups rather than a single larger one. There are a relatively small number of active recorders though, and coverage for national surveys is seldom complete. The North Solway Ringing Group is very active and continues to ring in excess of 8,000 birds each year.

Many of the invertebrate taxa are under-recorded and the region presents great opportunities to expand our knowledge for even the most publicly accessible groups such as butterflies and dragonflies. Butterfly Conservation successfully ran training courses on butterfly recording in 2003 and 2004, which has recruited a number of new recorders and led to the establishment of new transects in some locations. Move into other species groups and the opportunities to find species new to the region are even greater. The last two years have seen the discovery of a sizeable breeding population of banded demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* on the outskirts of Dalbeattie and crescent dart *Agrotis trux lunigera* on the Galloway coast, and it seems likely that both have been overlooked for some time – the timing of their colonisation is therefore impossible to know. Recently, only the second Scottish

record of the micro-moth buff-marked neb *Monochroa lucidella* was made at Mersehead RSPB reserve.

Plant recording is similarly under-represented, and despite having knowledgeable and enthusiastic local BSBI representatives active participation in groups such as BSBI is still relatively small.



Distribution map of Grey Squirrels 2006

There is, however, positive news on mammal recording. red squirrels in South Scotland have had a project officer in place for several years and the profile of red squirrels and recording in the region is high. The local bat group has recently been resurrected and has already been active in monitoring and in organising public events. A successful bid to the Scottish Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme by Dumfries and Galloway Council has enable a series of mammal identification workshops to be run by the LRC in 2005 and 2006 so the prospects for improved coverage and participation in this area seem good.



Dragonfly recording at Silver Flow

Dumfries and Galloway is full of hidden gems – areas of considerable ecological interest waiting to be discovered. The Dumfries and Galloway Environmental Resources Centre would welcome any records for sites in Dumfries and Galloway from visiting naturalists.

MARK POLLITT

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Bankend Road, Dumfries DG1 4ZB
email: info@dgerc.org.uk Tel. 01387 247543
www.dgerc.org.uk

Reference material for naturalists

- *Dumfries and Galloway Biodiversity Action Plan*, published by Dumfries and Galloway Council.
- *Dumfries and Galloway Bird Report*, published by SOC.
- *Bird Walks in Dumfries and Galloway*, book published by RSPB Members Group.
- *Welcome to Wildlife in Dumfries and Galloway*, booklet published by SNH.
- *DGERC Newsletter* from the LRC.
- *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society*. Journal published by the Society. Includes results of local surveys.
- *Tidelines* Newsletter of the Solway Firth Partnership.
- BRIDGE www.smartgroups.ocm/groups/bridge Online newsgroup for biological recorders in Dumfries and Galloway.
- *Highways & Byways In Galloway & Carrick* by Rev CH Dick. Book on the local history of the area.

Springwatch 2006

By Andrew Fairbairn

Following the success of last year's BBC Springwatch and Autumnwatch recording schemes, a joint initiative by the BBC and the UK Phenology Network, this spring sees the launch of *Springwatch 2006*.

The UK Phenology Network is a partnership between the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and has been recording natural seasonal events on a national scale since autumn 2000. The science behind the scheme, *phenology*, is the study of the timing of natural seasonal events, and records show that this has been a popular pastime since the 18th century. With the concerns over climate change growing, each record received really does make a difference to vital research into how the seasons are changing.

The UKPN has a dedicated network of over 25,000 recorders, including a junior arm, Nature Detectives (www.naturedetectives.org.uk), recording the first signs of spring

and autumn. New recorders are always welcome – and recording can take place online or by post.

Currently the Springwatch team are asking for volunteers to look out for these six signs of spring –

- The first outdoor and active **7-spot ladybird**
- Emerging **red-tailed bees** (*Bombus lapidarius*)
- The first **frog spawn** to appear in local ponds, ditches and streams
- **Peacock butterflies** that are seen outdoors and active, rather than in buildings waking from hibernation
- **Hawthorn flowering**
- The arrival of the **first swifts**

Springwatch records can be made online at www.bbc.co.uk/springwatch, or by texting your keyword (spring ladybird/spring bee/spring frogspawn/spring peacock/spring hawthorn/spring swift) to 63399. The date and your location will be automatically recorded. Please check the website for more information on using your mobile to record. Records by post are also welcomed, postcards are available at local libraries. One has been included with this mailing.

This spring in Scotland, the ladybird has been the most popular of the Springwatch species, with almost twice as many records as its closest rival, frog spawn. In spring 2005, the bumblebee was the most popular of the six species, however this year the survey is recording the red-tailed bee, *Bombus lapidarius*, so it will be interesting to see how many sightings are made this spring. In 2005, just shy of 6,500 records were contributed from Scotland and the six events were roughly 8 days later than UK average dates. By 7 March this year (2006), we had already received 90 frog spawn, 104 7-spot ladybird and 26 peacock butterfly reports. So far it looks like spring 2006 may be slower than in 2005.

If this small taster whets your appetite for recording, a more detailed spring recording form can be accessed via the website, www.phenology.org.uk, or by calling the Woodland Trust on 0800 026 9650. With over one hundred different events to record in spring, spanning over sixty species in seven categories, there is something for everyone. Spring events range from budburst through to first flower in different species of tree, to recording the first active insects of the year.

The results of the Springwatch survey will be seen on BBC2 in May/June when the programmes return. In the meantime join in, and help break last year's record of 157,000 observations, made across the UK from Lands End to John O'Groats.

Andrew Fairbairn
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phone: 01764 662

ANNOUNCEMENT: The BRISC Wildlife Counts events timetable is now available!

Wildlife on your doorstep - Events Timetable 2006

The Wildlife Counts Project, aimed at delivering FREE local wildlife recording workshops for people who want to learn about the wildlife on their doorsteps, has launched its timetable of events. These varied workshop events range from wildflower and butterfly identification in grassland to counting insects in parks and commons to surveying bats using a bat detector in woodland.

All events will take place in local greenspaces in Falkirk, Stirling and North Lanarkshire. They are FREE, open to anyone who wants to learn about wildlife recording and aimed at beginners.

The events start with three indoor introductory workshops in late April, one in each region, which will give people some background into how wildlife recording is done and why. The rest of the workshops, each focusing on recording different groups or species, will run from May until October 2006. They will all have an outdoor session and will offer people the practical skills and knowledge to enable them to become wildlife recorders.

Learned skills will include what to look for when identifying a species, such as: the song of a bird; the pattern on a butterfly's wings; the number of petals on a flower or gills on a fungus. They will also contain information on what methods you can use for counting these species including quadrats, transects or just when out taking a walk.

In addition to species identification we will guide people through the recording process, from health and safety to equipment to how to fill in a recording form. We will also provide advice on local and national recording schemes and offer support to groups and individuals who want to become involved in wildlife recording. Once you have learned the basics of wildlife recording you can help to conserve your local wildlife by letting us or other schemes know what you have seen and where.

You are welcome to come along to all, some or just one of the workshops. All workshops are FREE but you must fill out a registration form to attend. The registration form and timetable may be found in this copy of Recorder News, on the BRISC website www.brisec.org.uk or from Claire McSorley brisc-wcp@btv.org.uk and 01786 474 061.

Once we have received your registration form we will send you more information about the meeting points, times of the events and what to bring with you.

Make your local Wildlife Count!

NARRS

National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme

What is NARRS?

NARRS is a partnership project led by The Herpetological Conservation Trust, which aims to implement national monitoring programmes for all UK species of frog, toad, newt, snake, lizard, turtle and terrapin. It will rely upon volunteers following structured protocols, but there will be plenty of opportunities for people to get involved at the simplest level. NARRS also aims to raise awareness and appreciation of amphibians and reptiles, in wildlife recording.

Why do we need NARRS?

Having good quality information on the status and distribution of species is important for many reasons: for measuring BAP progress, monitoring protected sites and species, reporting on European-protected species, informing policy and decision-making, development planning, conservation management, tracking alien species, education and raising awareness. There is insufficient data to meet these many demands. A scoping study in 2005 (English Nature Research Report 663, CCW Contract Science Report 666) found a wide gap between existing resources and recording capacity, and the information needs of most data users. A comprehensive monitoring programme, with effective dissemination to Local Records Centres and others, would remedy the situation. Moreover, amphibians and reptiles have a poor public image compared to furry or feathery animals, and to help change perceptions a major PR exercise will be necessary.

What will NARRS involve? How will it be achieved?

Lots of important local amphibian and reptile recording is already going on around the UK. NARRS will help local recorders to contribute to the 'bigger picture', adding value to their efforts. We are designing structured monitoring programmes with standard protocols and sampling strategies that will allow national, regional and local assessments of 'conservation status' for all species. The local Amphibian and Reptile Group network (www.arg-uk.org.uk) will form the backbone of the recording effort, but a major recruitment and training will be necessary. NARRS recognises the value of existing approaches to survey, but will promote standard best practice approaches that can be adopted by anyone who wish to do so. We anticipate a thousand or more volunteer surveyors, but many thousands of people could contribute records in other ways. Using novel media and methods to encourage wide participation, NARRS aims to raise awareness by bringing a wide cross-section of society into contact with amphibians and reptiles.

What next?

The Herpetological Conservation Trust is developing NARRS throughout 2006 so that national monitoring programmes can be rolled out in spring 2007. With funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, English Nature and Countryside Council for Wales we are currently engaged in wide consultations and pilot projects. If you wish to contribute, please contact us at: narrs@herpconstrust.org.uk. The NARRS partnership includes: Association of Local Government Ecologists, Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom, the British Herpetological Society, Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Froglife, Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, National Biodiversity Network, National Federation for Biological Recording (for the Local Records Centres), Pond Conservation, Scottish Natural Heritage, University of Kent, University of Sussex, and the Wildlife Trusts.

IT PAGE

From the editor : Some more websites to visit:

A Google search earlier this month led me to several interesting and useful Websites

The Bryological Society

<http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/bbs/bbs.htm>

This site has a number of very useful themes: a map of all the UK Vice Counties with relevant numbers and links to the bryological recorder for each VC. It was sad to see that there are a number of vacancies, especially in Scotland. The site has a section on how to get started, list of local groups and meeting, and a series of wonderful photos of various bryophytes – photo of a new species is added each month, so worth checking out. The images are truly works of art, as are the ‘portraits’ of two particular species, which shows several different views of the same species. This is a website to be visited regularly!

Amphibians and Reptiles UK (RAUK)

<http://www.herpetofauna.co.uk/identification.htm>

This site has excellent photos to help with the identification of all amphibians and reptiles found in the UK including established aliens, some of which pose a threat to our native herpetofauna, such as the American bullfrog *Rana catesbeiana*. There is an on-line recording form, newsbulletins, projects and one can subscribe the RAUK newsletter online.

Hoverfly Recording Scheme’s website at

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

This is a Dipterists Forum Recording Scheme. You have to register to get the full use of this site, but this is free. Here is another splendid, extremely useful and easily navigated site. It offers information and distribution maps for each species in GB, forums for discussion, and an up-to-date species list. There is a box where you can type in a postcode to get a list of species recently recorded in that area. Clicking on any of the species listed will take you straight to that species’s own page with one or more thumbnail photos (double-clicking on any of these will bring them up large). There are links to distribution maps and other information, or one can also just trawl through all the images on their own. A terrific additional help with the ID of these fascinating insects.

The Heteroptera Forum

This is a lively discussion forum for anyone interested in bugs, and there are in fact members from all over the world. Anyone can subscribe to take part. Postings at all levels of expertise, and with either local or widespread relevance, are encouraged. News, identification requests and interesting finds are most welcome. You can download issues of *Het News* at no charge by using the ‘Links’ on the menu to reach the associated *Het News* website. Membership of this group is granted automatically to those responding to invitations. For the purpose of site security other applications require approval, and the administrators hope potential members will accept the SMALL DELAY caused by this and the moderation of initial emails.

BRISC Website Managers Report April 2006

By Andy Wakelin

The site attracts about 16 hits per day with the bumblebee survey still popular to the extent that the BBC's SpringWatch website has a link to the bumblebee ID chart.

The main section of the website has been revised recently to improve the speed of loading and to arrange the material more logically. A similar review of the Member Only area will be undertaken in the next few months.

Monitoring of the Member Only area shows that not many members are visiting via the opening page (where the counter is placed) and it would be valuable to get some feedback about the usefulness of this part of the website.

The LRC forum continues to provide a convenient way of disseminating information amongst the members.

NOTE:

New Moth recorder for VC75 and 76 (Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde)

Due unforeseen circumstances a new county recorder for moths in VC75 and 76 has been appointed. Neil Gregory is a keen mother and is very interested in any records that may exist for these counties. Any records sent to the previous recorder cannot presently be traced.

droitwich@btinternet.com

01505 874275

For other information see:

www.southwestscotland-butterflies.org.uk "

LRC news

A number of Scottish LRCs are now producing colourful and interesting newsletters. The most recent issue for North of Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) can be downloaded from the centre’s website at www.nesbrec.org.uk

For a hard copy of the latest newsletter from the Scottish Borders Biological Records Centre (SBBRC), contact Jon Mercer at Scottish Borders BRC, Harestanes Visitor Centre, Ancrum, Jedburgh TD8 6UQ Tel 01835 830405. Also visit SBBRC at their website which is part of Scottish Borders Council website at www.scotborders.gov.uk/sbbrc

Both newsletters also list a number of training events in their locality. Booking for these is essential.

Many other Scottish LRCs have their own websites and provide training opportunities. Lothian Wildlife Information Service (LWIC) also has a very active discussion forum for local recorders.

It is great to see all taking advantage of the immense opportunities provided by the internet and email . ed

David Stuart Henderson

25th December 1944 - 29th December 2005

David, Heritage Officer at McManus Galleries, Dundee, died suddenly at home during the Christmas holiday period.

Well-known locally as a bird-watcher and geologist, David's unassuming nature belied a wealth of interests and experience. During his 41 year career with Dundee's museum service, David gained world-wide recognition for his detailed knowledge of the history of the whaling industry and the associated polar exploration and ship-building. He appeared on television several times enthusing about Dundee's prominent role in an admittedly brutal and controversial industry; his last appearance was in the BBC's "Coast" series of 2005.

Ever a fan of technology and gadgets, David's workspace was instantly recognisable from the clutter of partly dismembered audio-visual equipment, camera lenses, 8-track tapes, piles of 5¼ floppy disks and lumps of rock, all balanced precariously amongst letters requesting information about someone's grandfather who was a crew-member of a particular whaling vessel. His enthusiasm for the new helped bring the museum into the twentieth century by promoting the use of computers for documentation, wildlife recording and interactive displays.

Outside the work environment (usually), David was a keen builder of model boats and an addict of all things American, frequently being up into the small hours watching satellite broadcasts of ice-hockey and basketball games when not planning another trip there.

David was 'father' and friend to all of us; his wit, conversation and knowledge of the collections are sorely missed.

Joe Sage,
Senior Technical Officer, McManus Galleries and
Museum

Book Reviews

Crofts, R. & Boyd, I. (eds.) (2005). *Conserving Nature: Scotland and the wider world*. John Donald, Edinburgh. ISBN 10:1 904607-47-0, pbk. £20.00.

In his preface, Magnus Magnusson describes this book as a *festschrift* to the late Dr J. Morton Boyd; defined as a collection of essays by a number of people to honour an eminent colleague. He then lists the twelve authors, their brief biographies and the relevance of their essays to Boyd's life. In different words and emphasis, a similar summary is the basis of the concluding chapter by the editors, who are also authors of two of the eleven essays. Although there is much in this collection that is excellent, overall the quality is varied.

Here is my selection in the first category. Martin Holdgate's overview of *Global Conservation in the 21st Century* is a masterly summary of where we have got to and are likely to be

going. He is challenging; for example, a few readers might not be pleased at his statement that "Today's age is of recombinant biogeography, and some losses of biodiversity and the emergence of new ecosystems, including so-called 'invasive aliens', is inevitable." Likewise, Michael Usher writes with confidence and truth (as it seems to me) on *A Developing Science of Nature Conservation*. I am ashamed to admit not knowing the writings of Jeremy Rowan-Robinson. His chapter, headed *Resolving Conflicts in Nature*, is an excellent summary of recent cases in law and the relevance of Acts of Parliament. I also enjoyed the chapter by Roger Crofts, *Stakeholders in the Natural Heritage: Resolving Conflicts*, for example his discussion of who sets the agricultural agenda. Perhaps it might have been better had the last two words in the title of his essay been omitted, so as to avoid an impression of overlap between Rowan-Robinson and Crofts.

Of course other authors have lots of interesting things to say but in a brief review I must also give space to a few of my many worries. Here are four. (1) In Chris Smout's chapter on *Environmental Consciousness*, towards the end there is a throw away remark in parenthesis about ecology: "in many ways a flagging discipline by the end of the twentieth century". This produced no more than slight irritation at a first reading, but in the concluding chapter by the editors this becomes "Smout is scathing, describing ecology as 'in many ways a flagging discipline towards the end of the [20th] century'. I consider this so contrary to reality that I tried out the phrase on five eminent ecologists. Four responded with an emphatic negative; one, inclined to the same view, wanted to understand how flagging had been measured. (2) In an interesting passage about hunting and the positive role of organisations such as the British Association for Shooting & Conservation, Smout observes that "The missing factor is a spiritual sense of elation and peace in the presence of nature." I can only wonder from whom this insight is obtained; my nearest BASC member, wildfowler and roe deer stalker avers quite the contrary: that the spiritual aspect of his night time forays is crucial to his enjoyment. (3) Laughton Johnston knows north Scotland well but he is way off beam when he writes, in *Managing Nature in Scotland*, "nature has been all but obliterated by stone, concrete and waste in the urban and industrial areas of Scotland...". This does not square with, for example, kingfishers flashing their brilliant blue on the River Kelvin, in the heart of Glasgow, where there is also much evidence of otters (David Bell, pers.com); also foxes in Edinburgh gardens and much done in recent decades to encourage wildlife in city parks. (4) The last author, in a chapter headed *Ecosystem Approaches to Management of the Earth System*, gets worked up about the term biodiversity. With regard to the Convention of Biological Diversity he writes "This has spawned the development of biodiversity strategies and action plans but are these simply castles built upon sand?" Two pages later he adds "the slackness with which the principle of nature conservation is being applied through the looseness of definitions, such as that of biodiversity, is a legacy which we may live to rue during the next few decades". Yes, of course, terms such as biodiversity have several definitions; see, for example, *Biodiversity, Measurement and Estimation*, Hawksworth, D.L., (editor) (1995), The Royal Society and Chapman & Hall, London or *Biodiversity in Scotland: Status Trends and Initiatives*, Fleming, L.V., Newton, A.C., Vickery, J.A. & Usher, M.B. (eds.) (1997), The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, but why be so negative about a useful concept? An ecologist I

consulted, regularly employed to carry out biodiversity assessments as a consequence of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act, 2004 (which places a duty on public bodies in relation to the conservation of biodiversity) tells me that this is a useful and constructive procedure.

Another worry relates to references. Whereas Holdgate and Usher each have three pages of references, and most others between one and two, the last two chapters have just half a page or less. This results in much of their writing reading as opinion, shooting off arrows in all directions, which is surely less than acceptable for a serious *festschrift* volume.

My final concern may be as a consequence of totally acceptable reasons in relation to the length of time between drafting chapters and later editing, printing and publishing. Perhaps it is just bad luck but here are some omissions. In Holdgate, there is no mention of Duncan Poore's *Changing Landscapes* (2003), Earthscan, describing in considerable detail the development of the International Tropical Timber Organisation and its influence on tropical forest management. Neither Rowan-Robinson nor Crofts mentions Roger Sidaway's *Resolving Environmental Disputes* (2005), Earthscan. In a concluding paragraph of Rowan-Robinson's essay he refers to the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill, which is now an Act. Tam Dalyell's perceptive *View from inside Parliament* has nothing about hunting with dogs and fox hunting. Crofts has several references to the Scottish Landowners Federation, which was renamed the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association in March 2004. And there is nothing much about wind farms. The upshot is that some of the book reads as already out of date, without even a brief cognisance of how fast some events have moved on, perhaps by a footnote at the beginning of the book.

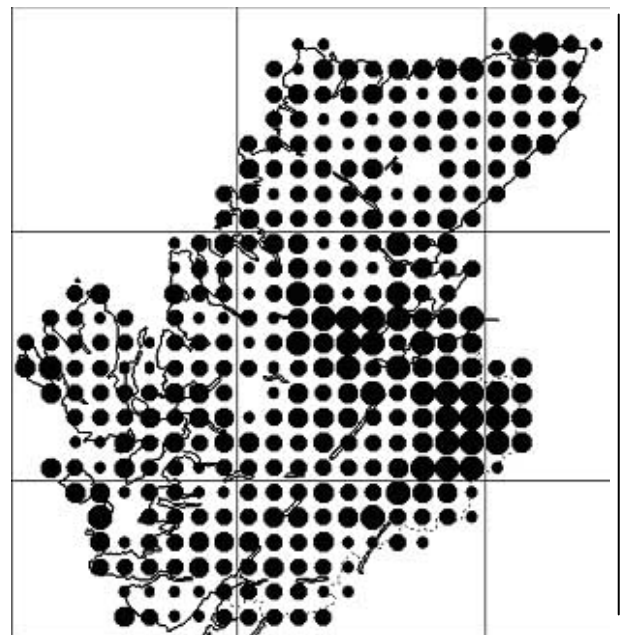
Thomas Huxley

Macdonald, M. & Nisbet, G. (2006). *Highland Bumblebees: Distribution, Ecology and Conservation*. Highland Biological Recording Group,- order from Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, Castle Wynd, Inverness, IV2 3ED or www.hbrg.org.uk. ISBN 0-9552211-0-2. pbk £3.50 with an SAE for 47p or 64p. Membership of HBRG + a copy is £6 +SAE. HBRG members £2 + SAE.

This short book is essential reading for those of us (encouraged by BRISC) who wrestle on the pleasantest days of the year with the distribution and identification of bumblebees. You do not have to be a resident of Highland region, or even a visitor, to find it invaluable. Among its many virtues are extremely helpful hints on identification, and up-to-the-minute taxonomic information. This is the first time I have read an account of the identification differences between *Bombus lucorum* (white-tailed bumblebee) and the newly discovered *B.cryptarum* (which turns out to be common in Highland). Also, the information on the field characters of *B.soroensis* (broken-belted bumblebee) and *B.muscorum* (moss carder bee) includes important details not in the standard guides, and I have not seen before the observation

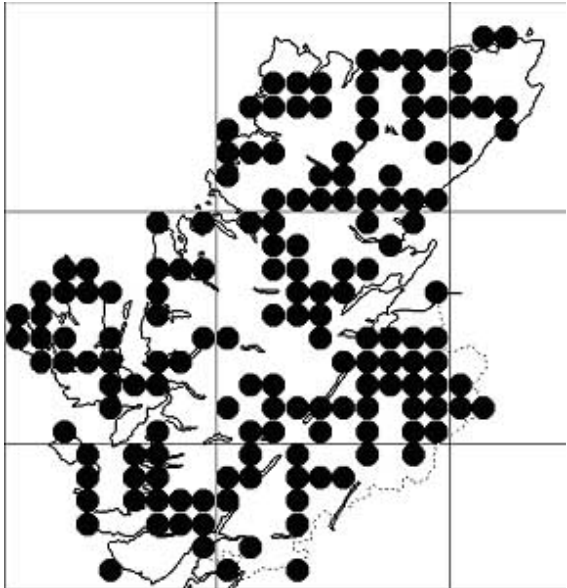
that *B.bohemicus* (gypsy cuckoo bumblebee) males can have a yellow tail.

The book is divided into short sections dealing with biology, habitats, forage and pollination, conservation, identification keys and 'species' accounts' that focus on distribution and phenology. There is a centre spread in colour with thirteen illustrations of different bumblebee species and nine of some favourite food plants. Perhaps the most impressive aspect, considering that Highland region is substantially large than Wales but with a tenth of its population, is the completeness of the coverage. Ninety-seven per cent of 351 ten kilometer grid squares were covered in a 15-year survey between 1990 and 2005, surely many of them only through the unflagging energy of the authors themselves, though another 68 recorders are listed. The richest areas for bumblebee biodiversity lies within a 60km radius south-east and north-west of Inverness.



Effort map by 10km²: larger dots = more species recorded

Twenty-three species of bumblebees (including the cuckoo bees) are currently found in Britain, of which eighteen are in Scotland. Sixteen of these are found in Highland region, and six of these are scarce in Britain but not in Highland. One, the beautiful *B.distinguendus* (great yellow bumblebee), hangs on in Highland region but has disappeared from England and southern Scotland: it is common only in the northern isles and parts of the Outer Hebrides. It is particularly interesting to discover that *B.soroensis* was recorded for about half the Highland region squares, when it is regarded as having only a scattered and sparse distribution elsewhere. Identification problems may be partly responsible, and *B.lucorum* queens in June and July clearly deserve a second look wherever you live. Climate change may be responsible for an increasing number of Highland records of *B.terrestris* (buff-tailed bumblebee) and *B.lapidarius* (red-tailed bumblebee), but can hardly be blamed for the decline of *B.distinguendus* and the loss of *B.ruderarius* (red-shanked carder bee), now confined in Scotland to Coll and Tiree.



Distribution map for *Bombus soroensis*

A particularly rewarding, though brief, section, is on forage plants - listed with both the Latin and common names - demonstrating the importance to many bees of heather, blaeberry, willow, raspberry, bramble, foxglove, clover and the vilified ragwort, all abundant in the semi-natural expanses of the highlands where habitat is so much less fragmented than elsewhere. But also significant, particularly for *B.terrestris*, and for *B.hortorum* (garden bumblebee) early in the season, are exotic perennials usefully grown in gardens: 'if you feed the birds in your garden, it will be full of birds - the same is true for bumblebees'. The shrewd conservation gardener will ensure that there is a succession of flowering plants from the lungwort and flowing current of early spring to the hebes and buddleias of autumn.

The authors, and the Highland Biological Recording Group, are to be envied and admire for producing the first local atlas of bumblebees in Scotland and a book, excellent in so many respects, which sets a very high standard for all future publications.

Chris Smout

BRISC is particularly delighted to see the fruition of this massive effort. It is not only the first local atlas of bumblebees produced anywhere in Scotland, but only the second local account for anywhere in Britain and Ireland. Readers will of course be aware that BRISC has for some years been promoting the recording of bumblebees, and through survey packs and our website generally encouraged a much higher profile so highly deserved by these beautiful, attractive and useful insects. The atlas will be a difficult act to follow, but BRISC sincerely hopes that work on more local atlases will ensue, encouraged by this excellent publication.

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Some dates for the Diary

BRISC annual conference

8 April 2006. Wetland Recording and Monitoring. Venue Tweed Horizons Centre, Newtown St Boswells, Scottish Borders. Cost £12 for members; £16 for non-members and £6 for students (everything included). An excursion to Whitlaw Mosses NNR is optional. Contact Jon Mercer, Scottish Borders BRC, Harestanes Visitor Centre, Ancrum, Jedburgh TD8 6UQ
Tel 01835 830405 – or visit BRISC's website at www.brisc.org.uk

Tay Estuary Forum annual conference

28 April 2006. Venue: West Park Conference Centre, Perth Road, Dundee. Cost £40 (includes lunch and refreshments). Booking by 14 April. For booking form and programme contact Katriona Finan, Tay Estuary Forum, Ewing Building, University of Dundee, DD1 4HN. E-mail k.finan@dundee.ac.uk

NFBR annual conference

5-6 May 2006. Biological recording for the future. Venue: Millennium Training Centre, Great Barr Hotel, Birmingham. Booking by 14 April. Costs vary from £40-£190, depending on choice of participation and accommodation. Contact J.A.Newbould, 3 Brookmead, Sutton Poyntz, Weymouth, Dorset DT3 6RS. E-mail john-newbould@btinternet.com Tel 01305 837 384, or visit NFBR's website at www.nfbr.org.uk

Training opportunities:

Kindrogan's summer programme is very full and varied as usual. Do take time to visit their attractive new and colourful website at <http://www.field-studies-council.org/kindrogan/> and enjoy a virtual tour of this immensely attractive location. Click on the tab which says 'Leisure learning for adults and families' to see the extensive and exciting programme for 2006. You will be tempted to join at least one of the courses – I was!

LRCs Do contact your nearest Local Records Centre to find out what training opportunities they provide. If you do not know where it is or who to contact, visit BRISC's website at www.brisc.org.uk, where all Scottish LRCs are listed with contact details.

Wildlife Counts is BRISC's latest project. For more information about this and the long list of events, see the enclosed leaflet or contact Claire McSorley, E-mail brisc-wcp@btv.org.uk Tel: 01786 474 061.

Deadline for next issue is June 16 2006.

All material – preferably in electronic format

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