

BRISC BURSARY NEWS 2023

BRISC, along with the Glasgow Natural History Society, Inverness Botany Group and NatureScot are pleased to be able to continue to award bursaries to those wishing to improve their natural history skills and contribute to biological recording in Scotland. This year, awards have been offered for 9 bursaries in total for courses including:

- Lichens of Birch and Pine Woodlands
- Identification of dragonfly larvae and exuviae
- Introduction to Spider Identification
- Identification of Solitary Bees
- Identifying grasses using vegetative features.
- Discovering Fungi

We look forward hearing about the courses through newsletter articles later in year as attendees complete their chosen courses, and hope you also enjoy reading about how BRISC are supporting people across Scotland to expand their skills and knowledge.

If you'd like to find out more about the bursaries, visit the website <https://www.brisc.org.uk/bursaries>

COPY DEADLINE : 30 June 2023

Articles, recording news, book reviews, stories of favourite places or species are all welcome. Please send copy in Word or Open Office format. Photos are welcomed but best as jpeg files. If the data is large send them via wetransfer or similar.

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BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND



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www.facebook.com/BrisScotland

Recorder News

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Social Media and Recording Dynamics

Chris Stamp

During the last three years I have been involved in a collaborative project to map the distribution of the Purple Hairstreak butterfly in Scotland after I discovered that it was surprisingly under-recorded in my own local area, as described in previous editions of this newsletter.

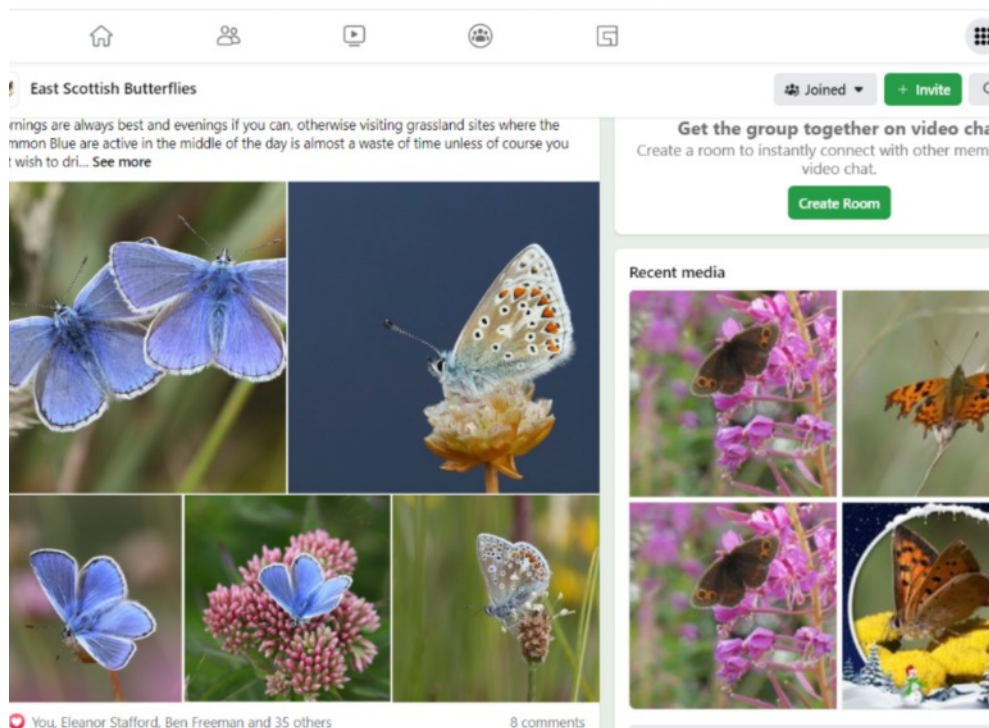
In this article, rather than talk about the butterfly I aim to describe how modern communications and social media were leveraged to mobilise a recording community in ways that could be relevant to biological recording more generally.

The catalyst was discovering the East Scottish Butterflies Facebook group, run by Scottish

Borders Recorder Iain Cowe. Iain's unique style in describing his own butterfly recording and photography trips, turning them into epic mini-adventures, had attracted a small but not inconsequential community of enthusiasts of various levels of expertise. Iain was achieving a balance of entertainment and beautiful photos with expert information, and genuine insight into the world of butterfly recording and the fascination of just going out and spending time in local habitats to see what can be discovered.

Iain Cowe had achieved many things in pure recording terms, but the most significant seem to be his discovery of White-letter Hairstreaks north of the border, followed by a dedicated effort to learn more, photograph them and share his excitement with as many people as could be persuaded to take notice. He was also finding eggs of the butterfly, something I had never really considered a realistic possibility for a hobbyist like myself.

Living in Perthshire, White-letter hairstreak hunting was not something I could contribute to, but I realised that I did have something locally that Iain didn't have: *Purple* Hairstreaks, which I had previously encountered at Kinclaven Bluebell Wood not far from my home. It was a species that



(part of) **'East Scottish Butterflies' Facebook page**

only occurred in a very few old oak woods. At least so it was believed, but inspired to look deeper by Iain's efforts I soon discovered otherwise. To cut a long story short (the story already told in previous articles), I found them almost everywhere that there was a mature oak tree including to my amazement, the tree overhanging my own garden. A stroke of luck shortly afterwards led to me finding an egg of a Purple Hairstreak on a windblown twig, which I somehow went on to rear into an adult butterfly, and suddenly I had a story to tell and an audience to tell it to.

The Facebook group had inspired my effort initially and the ability to share the excitement at each discovery instantly on social media,

with a community of people who I knew would be interested, was an encouraging new dynamic. I went on to present online (in the Covid era) to wider audiences at Tayside Biodiversity and Butterfly Conservation gatherings and to write articles for various newsletters, in the hope that I could spread the word further and recruit others to try to repeat my experience in other parts of the country, thereby multiplying my own recording efforts for this fascinating 'secret' species. (I had learned that it is not a butterfly that you are likely to see accidentally, due to its evening and arboreal habits, but I had gained knowledge of how to find them that could be easily shared.)



NBN Trust update for BRISC February 2023

NBN Atlas – Fit for the Future Project

As reported in the last BRISC newsletter, the NBN Trust's Fit For The Future project (FFTF) will upgrade the NBN Atlas and re-align it with the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA). Improvements will also enable the NBN Trust to manage increases in data volume and different types of data, such as eDNA studies and habitat data.

We are pleased to report that in January, we reached two significant milestones in the project:

1 - We completed the removal of elements that had been altered from the ALA and upgraded the platform code. This is the most important undertaking in the project.

2 - The first upgraded service, the Authentication Service, went into production. The Authentication Service cuts across the whole of the NBN Atlas Platform, so the upgrade was a considerable undertaking.

You can read more about the project on the NBN Trust website:
<https://nbn.org.uk/news/nbn-atlas-news/nbn-atlas-upgrade-project-news/>

Better Biodiversity Data Project

The Better Biodiversity Data Project (BBD), which the NBN Trust will lead and manage, was approved in October 2022. This is a partnership project funded by Scottish Government and NatureScot to develop the first steps in a strategic approach to the collection, collation and sharing of biological data across Scotland. The project will work closely with the Local Environmental Records Centres,

Recording Groups and other members of the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum.

Recruitment for the Scotland Programme Manager and Partnership Officer has recently been completed and further information on these posts and the next steps for the project will be available soon.

More information is available here:
<https://nbn.org.uk/news/better-biodiversity-data-project/>

Viewing iRecord notifications

When you add records to iRecord, you can receive notifications about the progress of those records, as iRecord can send automated emails to your registered email address. However, you can control how many of these emails you wish to receive, or you can turn them off altogether if you prefer. <https://nbn.org.uk/news/viewing-irecord-notifications/>

New President of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society

NBN Trustee, Wilma Harper, is the new President of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society (RSFS). Since 1854, the RSFS has been supporting the education of foresters and others who love Scottish woods.

You can read more about Wilma and the other NBN Trust Board members on the NBN Trust website
<https://nbn.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/nbn-board/>

We need you!

The NBN Trust needs your support. We on a mission to make data work for nature, but we cannot do it alone. If the UK is to achieve its goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030, we need to work harder than ever to make the essential evidence available. That's why we need you to join us in our mission - <https://nbn.org.uk/joi>

board to ensure that these are actioned as appropriate.

Thank you to everyone for their input. The Committee will consider these responses and any others received at the next meeting, and provide feedback to the members.

7. Election honorary members and Committee members: the Committee members listed (see back page) are happy to stand again. We do not currently have a dedicated Chair which raises constitutional issues; we will look to address this soon.

It is agreed to re-elect the Committee until the next AGM:

- Proposed – Richard Sutcliffe
- Seconded – Andy Wakelin

8. Honorary Membership – the Committee propose that Anne-Marie Smout is awarded an honorary membership to BRISC to recognise her immense involvement and achievements to biological recording in Scotland. This was approved unanimously by those attending.

9. AOCB – none raised

The meeting finished at 8.40pm.



Update on Future of - BRISC AGM 23rd November 2022.

Dear BRISC Members

BRISC's future was discussed at the AGM on 23rd November, based on the options paper that was sent to all members. We are writing to let you know that the members present voted unanimously to select Option 3 as the way forward.

This means that BRISC will continue for the next three years, after which there will be a review of the situation and a decision will be made whether to continue, or to wind up.

During the AGM, some key challenges were raised to be actioned, including spending the large balance in the accounts. Options for delivering this include:

- Further and/or more generous bursaries
- Supporting small biological recording projects in Scotland
- Supporting delivery of SBIF recommendations

Implicit in this was that that BRISC would have a much smaller balance in the bank account in three years' time, so that if we to wind down there would be a much easier to manage sum to disburse. In the past BRISC has aimed to have one year's worth of the charity's running costs as the surplus in the accounts.

The Committee will report back to the membership at the next AGM to outline how we are addressing these challenges.

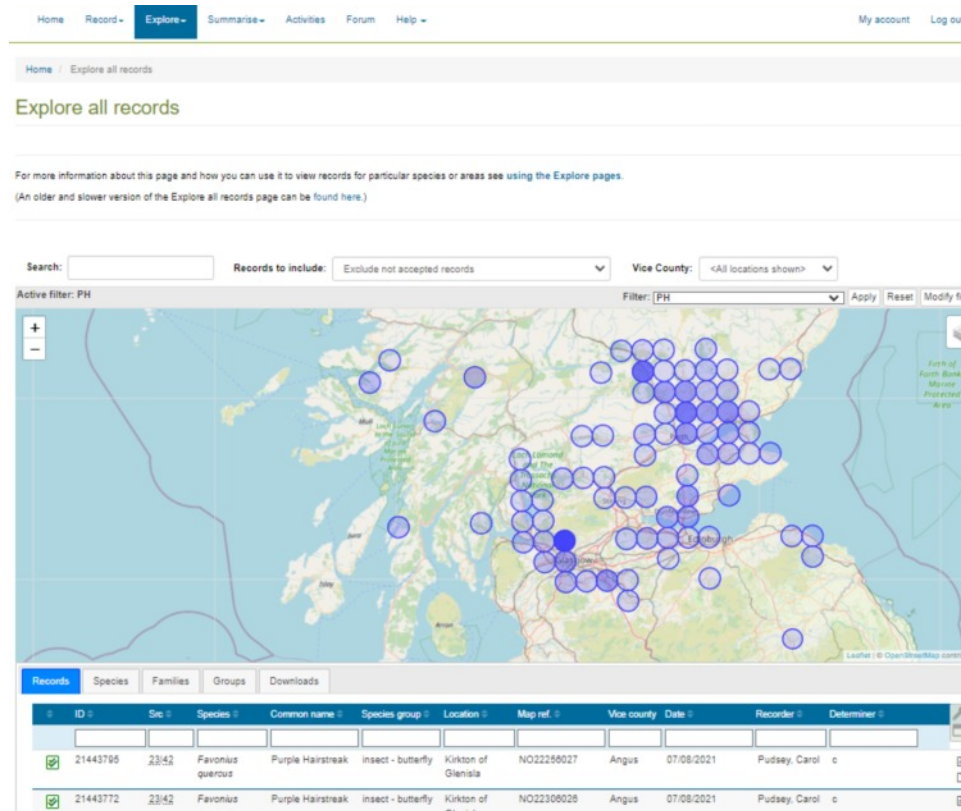
Best wishes,

The BRISC Committee

My efforts were well rewarded as I have since been well and truly overtaken in terms of recording dedication and further discoveries about Purple Hairstreaks by others. Recorders such as Carol Pudsey and Gail & Geoff Ballinger adopted Purple Hairstreak spotting as a major hobby during the butterfly's flight season, discovering the species beyond the known range and in more challenging habitats (for example in upland areas with fewer oaks) than expected. We now believe that this species, far from being one of the most localised butterflies in Scotland, actually seems to be one of the most widespread in the southern two thirds of the country. We are still learning fast about the

northern distribution. The map below illustrates what has been achieved in terms of mapping Purple Hairstreaks – obviously far more than I could have done alone.

The immediacy of social media and online recording systems helped achieve in just a few weeks each year something that what would have taken much longer in previous eras when incremental progress was not widely visible until next time someone published a printed article or an updated atlas. Our informal team of surveyors used the iRecord online recording system to enter records promptly. This system allows



Screenshot from iRecord, with a Purple Hairstreak filter applied

Excitement as species of butterfly spotted at reserve for the first time

The purple hairstreak butterfly has been increasing its range in Scotland

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Purple Hairstreak like this have been seen at Loch Leven NNR for the first time. Pic courtesy of Butterfly Conservation Scotland (image reference)

significant discoveries are now being made not by people who saw my own initial attempts at raising the profile of the species and spreading the word, but by those who have seen the results of people that I influenced originally. For example the discovery of Purple Hairstreaks in Speyside at the end of August 2022 can be traced back to my efforts, not directly but via a 'ripple effect' through online naturalist communities. (Incidentally this discovery, with photos and videos, was reported on Twitter, which contains at least as much inspira-

tion and 'networking' related to biological recording as Facebook does).

The ripple effect also led to a Purple Hairstreak discovery being reported in the Daily Record as a result of a large colony being found at Loch Leven NNR, providing a nice story for the reserve staff who went on to organise field trips for people to see them and help promote the NNR generally.

My own use of Facebook has become almost entirely related to biological recording and my interest in lepidoptera, which has been greatly enhanced as a result. I've also made many valued personal connections, including people from the Facebook group that I have since met in person (for example at a field trip at Loch Leven pictured below).

My reports apparently have in turn helped many others learn more and obtain greater enjoyment from their own interest. I now participate in a 'butterfly community' more than ever before. Several people have even had success with rearing the butterfly from rescued windfall eggs helped by a guide that I produced, and at least one person

you to see everybody else's records, and also to set up notifications for recording events of interest, which means that we were getting up-to-the-minute information on what each of us had been up to. In our case the system was functioning as the daily news from the world of Purple Hairstreak hunting. On several occasions when I had failed to find Purple Hairstreaks at a target site, I was delighted to discover by checking online that Carol or Geoff or others had had success. This 'live' progress information created a rewarding sense of being part of an active team effort over a wide area, with Carol for example making fascinating progress on the northern front and Geoff and Gail scoring major victories in the south east of Scotland. Other exciting records popped up from people we didn't know but occasionally managed to contact to enquire about their sightings. Each of us were inspired by pioneering discoveries of others and spurred on to greater ambition.

The potential for digital communications to propagate information and enthusiasm quickly in these days of online communication, 'viral' happenings and instant access to data is illustrated by the fact that many of the most

4. Membership – the report notes corporate (9) and individual membership (62) and fairly stable.

5. Bursaries – bursary uptake has been understandably reduced since Covid restrictions came in and remained low last year. Along with GNHS we are now offering an increase of up to £400 per course with up to £100 of that available to cover transport costs. We also accept applications for digital courses. Funds from the Inverness Botany Group are still to be allocated. (2023 uptake - pg 12)

6. BRISC's future – a paper was sent to the membership in August that outlines how the situation has changed regarding BRISC's role in the biological recording community. We have been in a good position and are pleased to support SBIF and various other initiatives. The Committee has provided three options for the future.

Views on the proposals:

R Sutcliffe – concern that we not there yet with the ideal recording infrastructure after only 2yrs of BBD. BRISC should remain with overview until this is clearer.

P Milne Home – sees the value of BRISC and would not like to see it dissolve. Individual societies need a representative and coordinating point to raise issues and provide support.

A Wakelin – committee membership is an endemic issue, not just for BRISC. Good to have an independent voice and overarching view – carry on while you can. Spend the money – potential new projects and more bursaries.

N Harmsworth – agree with previous comments. New logo implies continuation. BRISC do a good job and bursaries are excellent. Could support recording projects.

D Davidson – agree with previous comments. Agree with option 3 as presented. Continue with bursaries and fund other recording projects. Continue focus on SBIF/BBD and what comes next; could concentrate more exclusively on this to ensure delivery.

L Bamforth – valuable institution and continue if can. Understanding of the challenge of Committees run by volunteers. Agree with supporting other projects and ensure delivery beyond the end of BBD project – need an organisation to push issues.

K Watt – no comment

Megan – no comment

Additional comments:

R Smith – the recording landscape has improved over the last 22 years; re-imagining BRISC's role is a good idea. Concerns over the BBD which runs for only 2 years; BRISC has a role in monitoring progress and next steps.

M Rutherford – good to hear ideas and agree with proposals to spend money, including on broadening out to small equipment purchases etc. Keen to see more undergrad and recent graduates involved with biological recording; raise awareness of BRISC and bursaries with students.

S Eno – need to do a better job of promoting our profile and be clearer on our key tasks and detail of what we are trying to do – the Committee need to prioritise activities e.g. is SBIF our focus?

J Willet – NBN focus is not entirely on delivery of all the SBIF recommendations - 2.5 being taken forward out of 24. Many don't require substantial resource but don't have a responsible person allocated – BRISC could discuss this with the SBIF

BRISC AGM 2022 - Talks

The BRISC AGM took place by zoom on 23rd November. The business was preceded by two talks, with thanks to our two speakers for coming along.

David Long, Research Associate at [RBGE](#) spoke on "Bryophytes from the Borders and beyond". He summarised some historical recording in the region, as well as facts and figures on mosses, liverworts and hornworts. David showed photos of sites and interesting species found in unique and diverse places such as Holy Isle, peatlands including Dogden Moss and snow-beds giving Arctic tundra conditions. It was interesting to find out about how technology including increased use of DNA barcoding is discovering more about bryophyte taxonomy. An excellent book resource is Mosses and liverworts Britain and Ireland – a field guide and the website:

www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk

Lisa Chiltern (Chief Executive of NBN Trust) gave an update on the Better Biodiversity Data (BBD) project, which NatureScot and ScotGov recently agreed to fully fund. The project has been identified by the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) to secure biodiversity datasets in Scotland and make them more accessible, with Local Record Centres delivering consistent services across Scotland; embedding biodiversity data in the heart of planning and decision-making projects. This relates well to the NBN mission to "make data work for nature".

The next step is to recruit the project team with the NBN Trust leading the project following its development by SBIF. A steering group and stakeholder advisory group will be established; then stakeholders will work together to develop detailed proposals. Lisa

thanked BRISC for pressing the issue since 1975 that has led to this point, and for making financial contribution during the development of this work.

BRISC AGM - Business 2022

Welcome all and thanks for joining BRISC's digital AGM for 2022. No apologies were received. It was noted that one of our members Professor David Jenkins (Institute of Terrestrial Ecology) passed away recently; our thoughts are with his family.

Present: Richard Weddle, Louisa Maddison, Natalie Harmsworth, Keith Knight, Ken Watt, Mike Rutherford, Andy Wakelin, Duncan Davidson, David Long, Robyn Haggard, Sarah Eno, Jonathan Willet, Christine Johnston, Richard Sutcliffe, Michael Scott, Lisa, Sydney Gauld, Patrick Milne Home, Richard Smith, Francesca Pandolfi, Lisa Chilton, Megan, Angus Whyte, Lindsay Bamforth.

2. Minutes from last meeting – no comments or changes were proposed.

- Proposed – Richard Weddle
- Seconded – Christine Johnston
-

3. Annual accounts and treasurers report were provided and have been examined. Some changes have been recommended such as separating "restricted" and "designated" funds which shows in the accounts as described. These were approved unanimously.

The accounts are in good position, with recent outgoings to bursaries, our website and new logo. We are anticipating claiming for gift aid. Planned outgoings are to bursaries and contribution to the BBD project.

- Proposed – Sarah Eno
- Seconded – Natalie Harmsworth

has gone on to do presentations of their own on this topic to their local Natural History Society.

Aside from taking advantage of social media to stimulate biological recording, I also very much advocate the general use of iRecord or related systems (for example iNaturalist or Butterflies for the New Millennium Online) to share results and photos with others. There are certainly improvements to be made in their functionality and ease of use, but they are gradually developing and there are huge potential benefits to their widespread adoption. (For this project, I had to augment iRecord maps by combining information from other sources, creating hand-made 10km dot maps to share online and in presentations, as there was no standard up-to-date and complete source of data. The holy grail would be a single universal, definitive, up-to-the minute system gathering all data

and allowing it to be viewed by all, while easily showing differentiation between validated and unvalidated data).

On a final note, during winter 2022 things came a full circle when Iain Cowe was rewarded with his first ever Purple Hairstreak discovery: an egg at Dunglass Bridge in the Borders, home of a colony that Gail and Geoff Ballinger had found. It is amazing that any species could have escaped Iain's incredible devotion to finding butterflies in the Borders, but the social media group he created ultimately led him to this find, and the opportunity to study a new species that turned out to be present in his own patch after all!



A well-attended Loch Leven NNR Purple Hairstreak field trip

Chairs report - STILL VACANT!



Editors report *Sarah Eno*

If you are here you have probably read Chris's story of the use of social media in recording. It was a story I had followed closely as a member of East of Scotland Facebook page which is full of exciting lepidoptera stories. So it struck me there might be something to say about social media and Chris has come up top trumps.

The Great Egg Case Hunt - Recording the egg cases of Ray, Catshark and Skate species on shorelines. In 2022, 49 species and 372,597 cases were recorded round the UK. Each egg case is fairly distinctive and there is of course, a good ID sheet with instructions. <https://www.sharktrust.org/greategygcasehunt>



entoLIVE February to May 2023

The Biological Recording Company <https://biologicalrecording.co.uk/entolive-season-1/> have a large number of free online recording and learning events which are all bookable via Eventbrite. They are a member of the NBN.

Monday, 10th April 11:00-14:00

Biological Recording Virtual Symposium 2023: Why iRecord?

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1218827045418500/?ref=newsfeed>

News and Events

BRISC Spring Conference 2023: Wednesday 26 April, 7pm

See www.brisec.org.uk

Join us online for the Spring Conference where speakers will include Scott Shanks, talking about biological recording and outreach at Yorkhill Green Spaces in Glasgow, and Graeme Duncan discussing current work to create a new Marine Recorder.

NESBREC - www.nesbrec.org.uk/

Thursday 16th March 1.30-4pm

Online Amphibian & Reptile identification
Look more closely at the identification features of some of our local species and will include information on the ARC-Trust survey hub.

Booking is essential via Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nesbrec-amphibian-and-reptile-identification-tickets-568219137737>

Saturday 25th March 2023

NESBReC Recorders Forum, Zoology Lecture Theatre, University of Aberdeen

Interesting talks and networking with other biological recorders of all types of wildlife and representing all ages and levels of experience. Programme available and more details will be emailed.

Free but booking (by March 20th) is essential via Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/north-east-scotland-biological-records-centre-recorders-forum-2023-tickets-5552656960847>

BRISC BURSARY 2022

Discovering Wildlife Tracks and Signs *Selena M Russo*

Thanks to a bursary from BRISC and Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS) in November 2022, I attended a Field Studies Council (FSC) course on Wildlife Tracks and sign, which was held at the Dounans Center, in Aberfoyle.

As a biology student, aspiring to be an ecologist and conservation biologist, this course helped me develop wildlife identification skills that will benefit my career.

For a weekend, Dan Puplett guided our group through the identification of mammals and birds present in the environment, which we would otherwise not spot, through footprints, burrows, feeding traces, fur/feathers, bones, and droppings. Looking at muddy tracks we learned to identify different footprints depending on the shape of the claws and the number of toes. We also looked at marks left



Holed hazel nut shell

when feeding, for example, holes made on fruits/nuts by mice in comparison to birds or marks left on trees by beetles. We also found some otter poop, which allowed us to deter-

mine their presence in the area. By analyzing the excrement under a microscope one could be able to tell what they ate and develop knowledge of their food-chains. We learned that cherry gall wasp are growths on oak leaves caused by gall wasps deposition of eggs. The larvae will stay on the leaves after it falls during autumn and emerge as adults in winter.



Cherry wasp gall (*Cynips quercusfolii*)

In addition to tracks and signs, we also looked at the monitoring of wildlife through cameras and ink traps. With all this biological information we can determine the biodiversity and animal behaviour of an area.

After this course, I become more aware of tracks and signs in the environment around me, even in urban areas. Recently it snowed in Aberdeen, which allowed me to spot different animal footprints in the snow, mostly dogs, but I was surely excited to practice this new skill.

FSC courses and BRISC bursaries offer an incredible opportunity to develop skills for the gathering of wildlife data, and the identification of different species, which helps the conservation of plants, animals, and the environment.