



North Ayrshire Local Group

Newsletter

Edition 102
Spring 2004

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www.narspb.org.uk

Photos:

Top: Loch Ken - Stuart McMahon

Below: Robin - Tony Barr



RSPB Scotland Centenary

In 2004, RSPB Scotland is celebrating 100 years of working for Scotland's wildlife. The last century has seen many conservation successes, but we know that threats and challenges to wildlife are ever present and our work must continue.

Scotland is amazing for wildlife. The variety of species and habitats is outstanding – from golden eagles to otters, red squirrels to wintering geese and huge seabird colonies – all set among rugged mountains, moorland, ancient Caledonian pine forests and miles of coastline.

There is also exciting wildlife closer to home – in our gardens, parks and urban green spaces: from blackbirds and butterflies to bats. With your support, the RSPB will provide a better future for Scotland's wildlife for us – and our future generations – to enjoy.

We hope you will join the RSPB celebrations this year – and help us shape the future

of Scotland's wildlife and its habitats. We have ambitious ideas to help birds, wildlife and places across Scotland and look forward to another 100 years of action.

Timeline

1904 The RSPB starts work in Scotland protecting peregrines at Craighleith, Edinburgh, and seabirds on Orkney and Shetland.

1924 Launch of first RSPB local group in Scotland.

1954 Ospreys returned to Scotland (Loch Garten) after 50 year's absence.

1959 Osprey hide at Loch Garten opened, welcoming 14,000 people in the first six weeks of opening.

1967 Vane Farm opens as RSPB nature reserve and Europe's first environmental education site.

2004 Today with the help of RSPB members, supporters and volunteers we now manage more than 70 nature reserves and 62,000 hectares across Scotland, from Shetland to the Solway.

Future challenges

- To reverse the decline of the capercaillie
- To bring back the many once common farmland birds such as corn buntings
- To continue to seek solutions for house sparrow decline
- Fighting for investment to improve many of our protected sites for wildlife
- Working for greater protection and better management of seas and coastlines.

STOP PRESS RSPB Scotland announces Ailsa Craig as its newest nature reserve - full details on p3.

Chairman's Message

As the AGM of our RSPB Group approaches and in an attempt to keep it brief as is our custom, this witty may serve as my report or 'View from the Bridge'.

One hundred years of the RSPB in Scotland! Fifty golden years since the Scottish Ospreys return and the current success of the Red Gled reintroduction make for an optimistic celebration of our Scottish Centenary but we must not be complacent, the Capercaillie is at serious risk of extinction, the Peregrine falcon and Sparrowhawk are under threat from the racing pigeon lobby.

Action is required on behalf of the raptors. Write or email today to your local MSP *Semper vigilis!* In short, the pigeon fanciers are trying to table an amendment to the final Stage 3 debate of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill which would allow the culling of peregrines and sparrowhawks. More information on this topic is on page 9 of this newsletter.

Our North Ayrshire Group has had another good year with increased attendances on field trips to see many superb birds and excellent attendances at indoor meetings. My thanks to our speakers who have maintained the accustomed high standard of presentation. The use of our digital equipment funded by "Awards for All" both in-house and externally has been steady and a most effective tool for talks and teaching about birds and conservation up and down the county and beyond from Galloway to Lanarkshire and Perthshire! Stuart has instituted its use at our tea-breaks as "Forthcoming attractions and recent highlights" most professionally. He also conducted a Powerpoint workshop at the Volunteers' Day at Battleby this year.

That epithet "professional" is justifiably applied to all of the committee (one notable exception : moi) most have attended the RSPB's Volunteers' days regularly. These stalwarts have been the true engineers who have maintained the level flight of our Starship (oh no, not again) in spite of the doubtful stability of the Captain! (*Ed - from next season I'm banning Star Trek references in your letter!!!*) My thanks to them and to you all for confident support throughout the year. While still looking forward to more meetings and field trips including Culzean and the Farne Islands, we already have a good programme pretty much in place for next session with a couple of very special attractions: A chartered sail to Lochranza aboard the MV "Cruiser" this summer and hopefully a chartered sail on the PS "Waverley", around Ailsa Craig of course, in 2005

The numbers at our Christmas Party were down due to the snowbirds' flight to warmer climes, who could blame them! We will invite local camera club members (they support the Paisley CS exhibition every year) to augment our festivities this year and to show us some of their work... we have several members in common, good old symbiosis!



Photo:
Black throated diver - RSPB



Forthcoming Events

Black=Indoor meeting
(Ardrossan Civic Centre at 7.30pm)
Blue=Outdoor Trip

Saturday 27th March

Culzean Castle - Meet at Park Centre for a ranger-led walk. Minibus available.

Friday 23rd April

Annual General Meeting, followed by Dr Rupert Ormond - The History of Millport Marine Research Station.

Saturday 24th April

Trip to Big Cumbrae / Marine Research Station. 9.45am ferry dep. Largs. Cost £3.95 Adult return.

Friday 4th - Sunday 6th June

Weekend Trip to Farne Islands.
FULLY BOOKED.

Saturday's July & August

Showing People Seabirds on board the Arran Ferry. See p10 for details.

Saturday 14th August

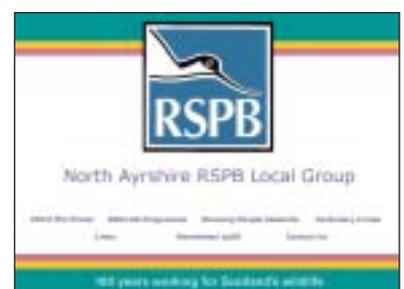
Centenary Cruise from Largs to Lochranza. See p10 for details.

Friday 17th September

Opening meeting for the new season

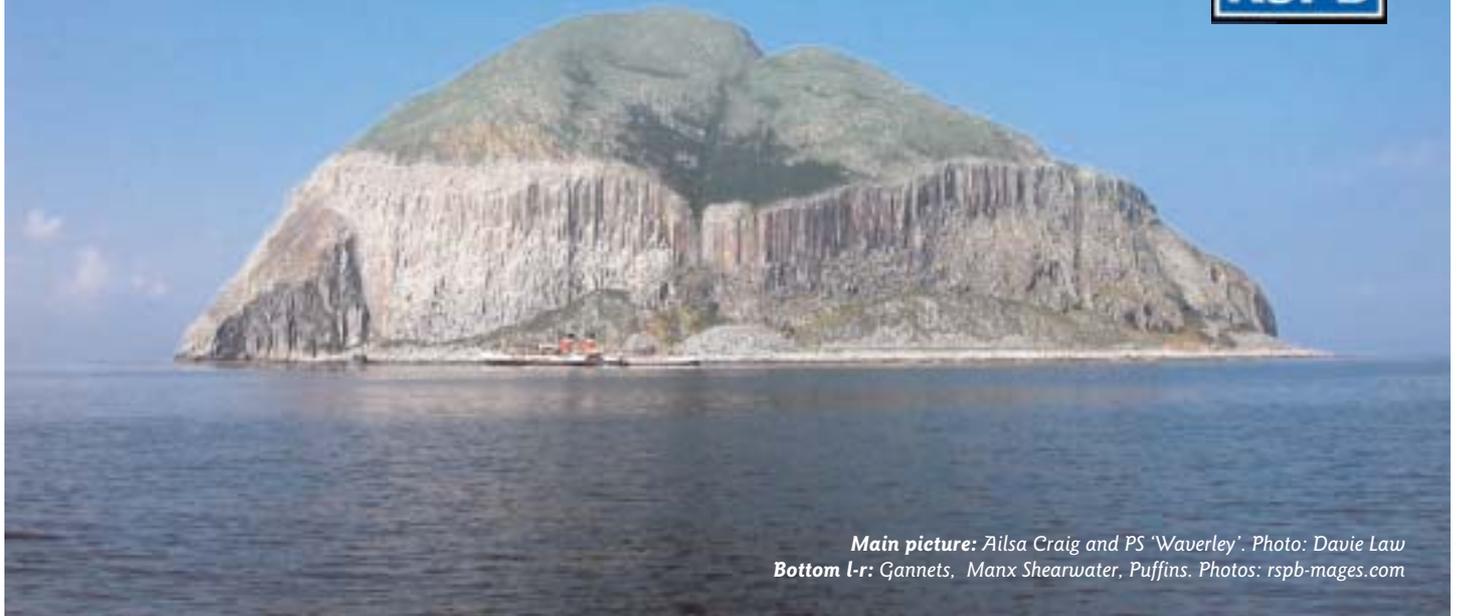
New Group Website

The Group now has it's own website containing information about the Group and our events. Please give us a visit at: www.narspb.org.uk



Ailsa Craig

A Treasured Isle



*Main picture: Ailsa Craig and PS 'Waverley'. Photo: Davie Law
Bottom l-r: Gannets, Manx Shearwater, Puffins. Photos: rspb-mages.com*

Its silhouette is one of the UK's most recognised. It is also renowned as being amongst the most important breeding sites for northern gannet in the world and granite from the island has been used for curling stones for centuries. Now, Ailsa Craig off the west coast of Scotland in the Firth of Clyde has become the newest RSPB reserve after an agreement was reached with its current owner, the Marquis of Ailsa.

The 104-hectare island sits only 12 miles off the south Ayrshire coast, at the mouth of the Firth, and is home to more than 40,000 pairs of gannet. This makes it the third most important site in the UK for this species behind St. Kilda and Bass Rock. Ailsa Craig is a haven for various other seabirds as well, including guillemot and razorbill. It was once, however, a fierce wildlife battleground, where the puffin population was decimated by an introduced marauding rat population. The

rats have since been eradicated in a unique operation and the puffins are now returning. It's believed there are only between 10 and 20 pairs on the island, where once there were tens of thousands.

RSPB Scotland's Regional Reserves Manager Alan Lauder said, "Establishing Ailsa Craig as a reserve is a real coup for the Society as the island is internationally renowned for its wildlife and raw beauty. We can now continue the work started by others to make sure the puffins and other seabirds re-colonise the island, and the gannets continue to thrive when they return from northwest Africa. It gives us a fantastic opportunity to tell the UK and the world about our amazing wildlife".

The island is also famed for its high quality granite. This has been used for fashioning the stones used by the winter Olympic curling team champions. Quarried granite, removed in the past, should continue to provide users with high quality stone for

many years. Under RSPB management, any further activities or developments can be closely monitored to prevent causing harm to the wildlife or habitat, which tens of thousands of birds rely upon.

"RSPB also hope to work in partnership with other groups and organisations to give visitors the opportunity to see the island and its spectacular seabird colonies by boat. Perhaps the Waverley paddle steamer could offer occasional birdwatching tours around the island?" Alan went on to say.

Stuart Housden, Director for RSPB in Scotland said, "The RSPB is very grateful to Lord Ailsa for this exciting opportunity in our Scottish centenary year. It is a real boost to establish a reserve at a place with such an interesting history. We hope that under our stewardship, we can look forward to more seabirds returning and opportunities for people to see the colonies".



Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve News

Lochwinnoch
in springtime
Photo: rspb-images.com



Jen Walker, Visitor and Publicity Officer, RSPB Lochwinnoch
jennifer.walker@rspb.org.uk

Life at Lochwinnoch has been ticking along nicely over the winter. Events are held all year round and we have now produced our new 2004 events program, which runs until Dec. Please pick up a copy the next time you're at the reserve or you can subscribe to our monthly events reminders by emailing lochwinnoch@rspb.org.uk.

OPTICS DEMONSTRATIONS

If you're interested in trying out binoculars and telescopes then we are now holding demonstrations on the third Sunday of every month.

AREN'T BIRDS BRILLIANT!

We will be watching sea birds at Lunderston Bay every month throughout the summer season, starting with Sunday 25 April, if you fancy a breath of fresh sea air and a chat with us do come along! (Just turn up sometime between 1-3pm).

TALK-TIME

The talks that we've had so far in 2004 have proved very popular and everyone has said that they've been extremely enjoyable! In January, Vanessa Collingridge entertained us with wonderful images of her expedition to the Antarctic to research climate change (*Ed - we are hoping to have Vanessa as one of our speakers next season!*). In February, Chris Rollie passed on his wealth of knowledge about Rabbin Burns in relation to birds – as always with much enthusiasm! 'Talk time' then ended in a climax with Duncan and 'A Celtic Adventure' this month. A wonderful adventure it was indeed!

BIG GARDEN BIRD WATCH

The number of people taking part in the RSPB's national Big Garden Birdwatch broke all records this year with so far 400,000 results submitted!

At Lochwinnoch reserve, we spent an hour on both days watching our feeding area alongside visitors and counted the birds there. I wonder how many people have a kingfisher on their lists?? (well it was right in front of the windows...)

WILDLIFE ART

This has been a popular theme since the beginning of the year. We held a Wildlife Art Exhibition in February with paintings by local artists; Gavina Reid and Duncan Watt brightening up our walls. Duncan also gave the Lochwinnoch Wildlife Explorers Group a teaching session on drawing birds, which has inspired many of the group to try various techniques. We just recently found out that every year, pupils of Linwood High School draw birds with the theme of designing a carrier bag for the RSPB! So they will be bringing their work down to the reserve to exhibit this year to let us all see (from 27 March to 18 April).

If you're more into photography then we now have a photography hide overlooking the feeding area, please ask for further details at the reserve. Maybe you could try and get some good shots and enter the Goldeneye Centenary Photo competition to help celebrate 100 years of the RSPB working in Scotland, entry forms are available here too.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

The regular sightings of a kingfisher sitting really close to the visitor centre, fishing in the pond nearby was a great attraction to visitors, volunteers and staff alike. Many people seeing a kingfisher for the first time and were thoroughly excited by this stunning bird!

The redhead smew has also been putting in regular appearances, moving between the Aird Meadow, Castle Semple and Barr Lochs. You may have already read about 'Bubble and Squeak' the two 6 week old otter cubs that were found at the end of the trail after their mother was knocked over on the road. Both are alive and well at Hesselhead Wildlife Rescue Centre. Thankfully, several of us saw three otters swimming around in the Aird Meadow Loch after all this happened so there's a happy ending!

I think I'll finish there, although there's always so much to say. I must thank Hesselhead Wildlife Trust Centre for their help with finding and looking after the otters and especially to all of you who help us at Lochwinnoch throughout the year!

JUST ARRIVED

The first of the summer migrants have arrived at Lochwinnoch with sightings of some Sand Martins.

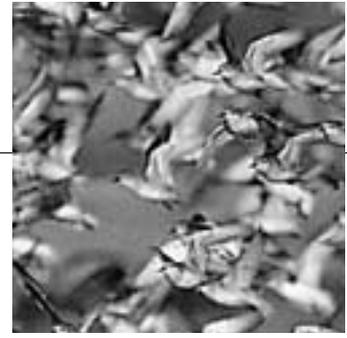
*Below left: Kingfisher - Photo: John Molloy
Below right: Andy Christie and Alan, a work experience volunteer with 'Bubble and Squeak'.
Photo: Dave Mellor*



And so the birds returned

Knot
Photo: rspb-images.com

RSPB Scotland, Edinburgh



Inter-tidal wildlife is beginning to thrive, revealing Scotland's first coastal re-alignment project as a major success one year on from the dramatic breaching of a seawall on the Cromarty Firth near Inverness.

The ambitious project has involved digging out two holes in a sea defence wall to allow seawater back in an area formerly claimed from the sea. This took place early last year at RSPB Scotland's Nigg Bay nature reserve.

It was hoped that, over time, mudflats would be re-created and native salt marsh vegetation would take hold. This would then encourage various wading birds and wildfowl such as redshank, bar-tailed godwit, knot, wigeon and pintail to return.

RSPB Scotland ecologist Neil Cowie said: 'Already, only a year since the seawall was breached, there are six species of salt marsh plants growing within the site at Nigg Bay, including sea aster and glasswort. Another major change is how the area of mudflat habitat is expanding.

'When the tide comes in, it brings through fine layers of mud, which brings with it many invertebrates, and they have now colonised the site in large numbers over the last year. This is ideal for wading birds such as redshank and curlew. In fact, last month we saw an astonishing flock of up to 200 redshank feeding at low tide'.

Aerial photographs show the stunning affect the pioneering project has had on the land. It is clear that saltmarsh plants are rapidly re-colonising the site that was only claimed from the sea 50 years ago. RSPB Scotland is interested in identifying other sites to carry out similar projects.

RSPB Scotland's Project Manager Kenna Chisholm said: 'This was Scotland's first managed coastal re-alignment scheme, and has been a fantastic success. At Nigg, we have demonstrated for the last 12 months that we can create and protect this precious habitat and people can now see the immense benefits.

'However, every year in the UK, we lose 100 hectares of salt marsh because of rising sea levels. There is an urgent need for more funding and government support for this kind of project in Scotland to claim back these critical habitats, which are also vital for the national and internationally important numbers of wading birds and wildfowl that use the Scottish Firths during the winter'.

In England and Wales, the Environment Agency has responsibility for flood warning and flood defence. In Scotland, no single coordinating body has responsibility for coastal protection or flood defence.

Unlike England & Wales, there is also no government funding for coastal realignment, which is slowing efforts to introduce this pioneering measure to combat the loss of coastal wildlife in Scotland.

Volunteers' Conference

Some of the North Ayrshire delegates at the conference.
Photo: Tony Barr

Battleby Centre, Perth, Saturday 28th February 2004
Stuart McMahon

Once again, this year's RSPB Scottish Volunteers' Conference was attended by several members of the Group.

The programme as always, was extremely varied and started with Stuart Housden, Director, RSPB Scotland, giving a talk about 100 years of working for Scotland's wildlife. The basis of his talk was given to Groups as part of a 'centenary toolkit' - it will be well worth seeing. Following Stuart, was Stewart Taylor who talked about 50 years of Operation Osprey - a nice golden anniversary to celebrate this year as well.

Following a break, Graham Wynne, Chief executive of the RSPB, gave his first ever talk to the Volunteers' Day entitled "Past Successes and Future Challenges".

Lunch was it's usual high standard and left everyone feeling extremely full up. Then it was on to a series of workshops, covering the topics of Recruiting Members, Wildlife Explorers Centenary Challenge, Renewable Energy and one run by myself on Powerpoint for Perfect Presentations! Question Time for a panel of RSPB personnel was followed by yet more tea, coffee and cream cakes, and the day was



rounded off by Ken Shaw talking about the story of Vane Farm. As a farewell a short video clip entitled "Scotland's Amazing Wildlife" was played - all being well we hope to show it at the AGM - it truly is excellent.

Congratulations to Tony, Bobby and Duncan on being presented with their silver badge awards from Graham Wynne.



Galloway Delights . . .

Stuart McMahon

*Striding along the path at
Loch Ken RSPB Reserve.
Photo: Tony Barr*



Nearly 30 members of the North Ayrshire Group visited Loch Ken on Sunday 29th February, on what turned out to be an absolutely glorious day.

Tony, at the helm of the minibus, and several cars gathered at New Galloway before making our way down to the RSPB reserve at Loch Ken. And it wasn't long before the first red kite was seen - just outside Mossdale and only a few yards away from the wonderful wooden red kite totem pole!

At the reserve a couple more kites put on a display beside the car park whilst scopes were quickly assembled to look at the flocks of geese - soon we had picked out the Greenland white fronted geese along with the greylags and some pink feet. In the field immediately in front of us fieldfares hopped about searching for bugs.

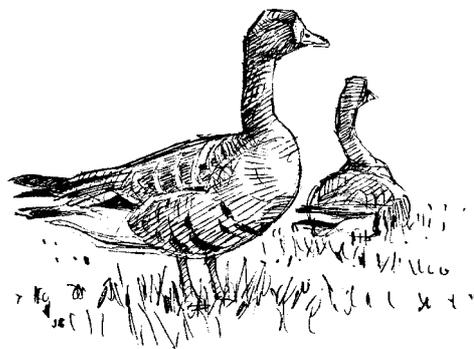
The pleasant walk along to the new hide didn't turn up much but nice views of reed bunting and treecreeper were seen. The downside to the clear blue skies meant that overnight there had been a hard frost and part of the loch in front of the hide had frozen over. Despite this some snipe were seen along with cormorant, canada geese and goosanders.

Returning back to the carpark for lunch another kite put on a wonderful display sitting closeby at the top of a tree. Soon it was time to head for the kite feeding

station near Laurieston. Because of the good weather most of the kites were away foraging elsewhere, but after a while a few put in an appearance overhead, along with some buzzards and ravens. Highlight though was the sight of a distant goshawk having a good mid-air tussle with a raven before going into an amazing dive before dropping out of sight.

Our final port of call was to Milton Loch, a short drive along the A75 towards Crocketford. Our quest here was to locate two rare ducks that had been reported. On arrival we met a couple of other birders who quickly put us on to a stunning male ring-necked duck.

Our views were interrupted though by a rather unpleasant and irate young lady who told us in no uncertain terms that we had to move from our location down a muddy track claiming it was private land (although there were no signs indicating this) and that she had 'had enough of all the birders last year'. After some protests her wishes were respected to avoid further confrontation.



In the meantime, some of our group had walked about 100 yards in the opposite direction towards another house and were admiring the wonderful slate sculptures when the lady came out and asked what we were doing. She was delighted that we were birdwatching and invited us to put our telescopes up in front of her house. We relocated the cars and minibus 100 yards further along and soon we got views of our 2nd target here - a lovely drake lesser scaup. The houseowner was delighted to have it pointed out to her. She also made reference to her less than enthusiastic neighbour!

Before we knew it the clock was showing 5.30pm and the sky was still wonderfully light, but it was certainly getting cold!

So ended our trip down to Galloway. A nice range of species were seen along with a few rarities, made all the better by the wonderful weather.

*Left: Greenland White Fronted Geese
Below: Kite Feeding Station at
Bellymack Farm. Photo: Stuart McMahon*



... but more Red Kites poisoned

RSPB Scotland

Tragedy, as two more of Scotland's red kites have been confirmed as illegally killed by poison in Dumfries and Galloway. These birds were part of the joint project by RSPB Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to bring back this rare and beautiful species to the area.

The two red kites were found near Laurieston and sent away for scientific testing by the Scottish Agriculture Science Agency to determine their cause of death. It was confirmed that both birds died as a direct result of eating the banned pesticide carbofuran. These deaths now take the total number of birds killed from the re-introduction scheme in Dumfries and Galloway to 11. This represents 12% of the 90 birds released in the area so far.

RSPB Scotland's Dumfries and Galloway Area Manager Chris Rollie said, 'This is an absolute disgrace. These birds are struggling to gain a foothold in Dumfries and Galloway because of senseless acts such as this. These birds pose no threat to anyone and are amongst our most beautiful birds and threatened species in

Scotland. They are a valuable asset to the local community and have already boosted local tourism.'

2003 had been planned as the final year for red kites to be released in the area, however, as a result of these recent deaths, another 20 young birds will be introduced later this year in an attempt to help the birds build up a healthy population in the area. These birds will come from the north Scotland population on the Black Isle as well as chicks from the Chilterns in England, where the population is doing extremely well.

Red kites are already becoming a major tourism earner for the area, with the recently opened kite trail around Loch Ken attracting more than 1,000 by Christmas after opening in October. Groups from as far afield as Northern Ireland have even started making the trip to the area just to see this remarkable bird. At the feeding station, visitors can enjoy the spectacle of several red kites circling overhead, an experience that until recently was not possible at all.



Red Kite
Photo: Tony Barr

RSPB Scotland Investigations Officer Dave Dick said, 'We are working with police in the area to assist them with enquiries in this particular case, and in others. It's tragic that a blatant disregard of the law by a few land managers is still jeopardising this amazing bird's success. The forthcoming Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill, will help further protect wild birds as it includes tough regulations on the use and storage of chemicals and pesticides. We welcome this. Giving more power to the police will be a great asset in the fight against wildlife crime'.

Bullfinch lamed

RSPB Legal Eagle, Dec 2003

In December 2002, the RSPB and the SSPCA caught John Duncan Mair setting up lime twigs next to a live decoy to catch finches at a trapping site in Scotland. A bullfinch was trapped while they filmed Mair. The next day, a search warrant was executed by the police, with assistance from the RSPB and the SSPCA, at Mair's address in Whitecraig Avenue, Whitecraig, Musselburgh, East Lothian. Mair's garden sheds contained birds including bullfinches and greenfinches. A tube of Italian non-hardening glue was seized, along with other items relating to finch-trapping. Mair appeared at Haddington Sheriff Court on 20 August 2003. He pleaded guilty to taking a bullfinch using birdlime, and was fined £400. He was admonished for possessing glue, lime twigs, chardonneret traps, bags and seed heads for trapping birds.

Chinese laundering helps conservation

RSPB Legal Eagle, Oct 2003

The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak has had a positive result for conservation. Because it is possible that it started with a virus leaping between animal species, the Chinese authorities have cracked down on the smuggling and eating of endangered species.

Some 170,000 forestry officers raided 14,900 animal fairs and 67,800 hotels and restaurants, and found a staggering 838,500 endangered animals. These included cranes, snakes, pangolins, anteaters and turtles. More than 1,428 people have been arrested as a result.



Cranes were among a staggering amount of endangered species found in raids on restaurants and hotels in China. Photo: rspb-images.com



Survey on hunting

The result of a survey by Abacus, requested by LIPU, revealed that 72% of Italians would like hunting abolished and that 82% would cast a vote, in a referendum. If only the politicians would listen more to the people. . .!

Petition against hunting

LIPU has launched a petition to stop parliamentary proposals that would threaten wildlife. We wish to block the proposed increase in the number of huntable species in the protected areas, the extending of the hunting season into migratory and breeding periods. the depenalisation of crimes associated with hunting, and more. See www.lipu-uk.org for more information.

Naples: 500 goldfinches released

A blitz by LIPU wardens and Carabinieri on the illegal Gianturco market in Naples They impounded about 500 Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, and Siskins. A dealer was arrested for violence. To avoid having his avifauna impounded he launched himself against a policeman and a LIPU warden.

Operation safe flight

Intense lobbying by voluntary LIPU anti-hunting wardens in Campania. In collaboration with Naples Environment officials and local carabinieri LIPU has urged action to prevent poaching along the coastal pools in the Domizia bay area (north of Naples) The LIPU president Giuliano Tallone has written to the authorities responsible for the region requesting law enforcement along the Domitian littoral. Supporting the request was a petition signed by over 6000 people. The Prefect of Naples has called a meeting of law enforcement personnel, with a view to effecting the destruction of the ambush hides.

About woodlands

Since October LIPU has given support to the Italian FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). Members must respect certain environmental guidelines. Good woodland management can bring about an increase in the number of different species.

Carabinieri and LIPU Rangers in Action in Salerno

200 small birds, 11 nets and many traps have been confiscated by Carabinieri and LIPU volunteers. One person has been charged with trafficking in protected birds. The birds had been destined for illegal collections and were immediately set free. The LIPU delegate for Salerno has commented that the illegal trade in wildlife is still deeply rooted in the area.

European Union - proceedings have been filed against Italy

Following reports presented by LAC (League Against Hunting) in 2002, the European Commission has opened proceedings against Italy for various infractions of the directives on conservation of wild birds in Sardinia and Puglia. The charges concern the illegal lengthening of the hunting season for some species.

Lombardy - Sparrows and Starlings

The Regional Tribunal in Milan has ordered the suspension of hunting sparrows and starlings that the Regional authorities had put on the list of huntable species. Killing these species is forbidden with immediate effect throughout Lombardy. Offenders can be taken to Magistrates court and have firearms confiscated. Action against the two regions was brought by organisations including LAC and WWF.

Chaffinches in Tuscany

Chaffinches in Tuscany have been saved. The Regional Tribunal in Florence has suspended with immediate effect all hunting of chaffinches. Such activities had been allowed by a Regional variation in national law. Without recourse to the court by environmental organisations there would undoubtedly have been a real slaughter of these birds. The Regional authorities had authorised the killing of 10 chaffinches each for up to 47,000 licensed hunters in Tuscany.



Sicily: More funds available for Parks and Reserves

Almost €5 million, in addition to amounts already allocated, are going to parks and reserves in Sicily. Mario Paravecchio, the Regional Councillor for Land and Environment, made the announcement. He has met the Presidents of the four Parks in Sicily, Nebrodi, Etna, Madonie and Alcantara, and representatives of reserve managers.

Coming soon . . . harriers and eagles

Zoe Clelland, RSPB South and West Scotland, Glasgow

For anyone who hasn't already experienced this wonderful initiative, can I recommend the Hen Harrier Viewing Project at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, a beautiful area of open moorland a short distance to the West of Glasgow. Here, during the early summer, you can see live footage of hen harriers at a nearby secret nest site on CCTV screens in the Park's Muirshiel Visitor Centre. A guide is on hand to lead programmed walks up onto the moors, where visitors may be lucky enough to see this rare raptor hunting over the moors.

Depending on the birds' own schedule, the cameras normally start transmitting images from the nest in late May. The project attracted almost 4,000 visitors last year and was particularly popular with families. Many people even made return visits to follow the progress of the chicks.

Live CCTV viewing of hen harriers at the nest will also be available during the nesting season on the Isle of Arran at Island Porcelain, Kilmory.

We are very keen to hear from volunteers who would like to help us with the Clyde Muirshiel project. Your role would be to greet visitors and explain what's happening on the monitors, answer general questions, and/or assist the Hen Harrier Project Officer with guided walks. You don't need to be an expert as training will be given. If you're interested or would like further information, please contact Zoe Clelland at the RSPB Glasgow Office on 0141 331 0993.

In addition, those who love raptors will be interested to know that the celebrated Sea Eagle Viewing Project will again be running through May, June and July on the Isle of Mull off the coast of Argyll this year. Here a hide is established close to



Photo: Hen harrier
rspb-images.com

a nest site and visitors join programmed visits, accompanied by an experienced guide, to watch these spectacular birds as they tend their chicks. Close-up views of the nest are also transmitted to the hide via CCTV.

Both the hen harrier projects and the sea eagle project are obviously dependent on the respective birds successfully establishing nests, so visitors are urged to ring RSPB Scotland's Glasgow office on 0141 331 0993 for further information when planning their visit.

Nature Conservation Bill

Julia Harrison, Advocacy Officer, RSPB Scotland

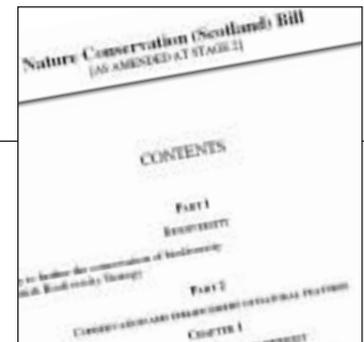
You may have read in the media that the Scottish Parliament's Environment Committee have been considering amendments to the very important Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill. I am therefore writing to update you on a particular issue of great concern to us.

Some of the amendments that MSPs put forward related to the concerns of some pigeon fanciers who believe that sparrowhawks and peregrine falcons should be culled, because they occasionally take pigeons. These amendments were ultimately withdrawn. However, the issue will arise again at the next stage. We are very worried about this as this is the final stage before the bill is passed and becomes law. It is crucial that such amendments are not passed. A legal cull would undoubtedly prove to be the thin end of the wedge for birds of prey, setting a precedent for other interest groups to follow.

At Stage 2 the Scottish Executive resisted calls to introduce a cull on sparrowhawks

and/or peregrines. This was an 'evidence-based' approach to policy, with decisions based on scientific fact rather than public pressure. However, in response to pressure from MSPs with pigeon racing constituents the Executive agreed to look at this issue again before Stage 3. This will be done in the light of as yet unpublished research by SNH on the issue. If this new work confirms previous findings, which is a very strong possibility, there will be no justification for allowing a cull. Indeed, under European law, efforts to try alternatives must be tried before any control measures could be used.

I'm sorry to have to write to you again on the subject of the Bill - but this is of great concern to us. It represents a significant threat to Scotland's birds, as well as our reputation in Europe. If you share these concerns, please ensure your MSPs are aware. If you would like to write to your MSPs on this issue, it would be useful to ask them to confirm whether they would oppose such amendments and to inform the Executive that they do not support such



measures. If you decide to write, time is of the essence. It would be best for letters to be sent by mid-April, before the Stage 3 debate in Parliament.

The MSP for Cunninghame North is Allan Wilson, and for Cunninghame South is Irene Oldfather.

A full briefing on the issue of pigeons and birds of prey will be available at your indoor meetings. It contains the main points but if you express these in your own words you are more likely to make an impact. I hope you find the briefing useful, but if you have any questions please give me a call on 0131 311 6538.

Showing People Seabirds

Horse Island and the
MV 'Caledonian Isles'
Photo: Tony Barr



Stuart McMahon

stuart@baronystjohns.co.uk

Would you like a day out sailing the high seas (well, the Firth of Clyde), soaking up the glorious sunshine and Showing People Seabirds?

Well, all you need to do is pass your name to myself and I shall add your name to this year's rota for the Arran ferry sailings. All being well, we hope to run them in the same successful style as in previous years, on Saturday's during July and August.

In addition to birds, mammals can also be seen from many sailings including the increasingly common harbour porpoise.

Tickets and lunch are generously provided by CalMac for the volunteers and we supply the information and materials to the public. If the sailings are full, then we will be able to set up our stall in the ferry terminal at Ardrossan.

The only date which we will not be attempting this year is the 14th August. This is the date of the Brodick Highland Games and is always fully booked resulting in several hundred folk usually being unable to board.

However this will be the date of our Centenary Cruise. Full details are given below.

Centenary Cruise

MV "Cruiser"
Photo: David Ritchie



Stuart McMahon

stuart@baronystjohns.co.uk

**Make a note in your diaries.
SATURDAY 14th AUGUST 2004.**

To mark RSPB Scotland's centenary the North Ayrshire Group is organising a special Centenary Cruise, sailing from Largs to Lochranza, on the Isle of Arran.

Departing Largs at 10am on board Clyde Marine's mv "Cruiser", we will sail down the Clyde past the Cumbraes before heading west past Garroch Head at the southern tip of Bute towards Lochranza on the Isle of Arran. During this outbound leg of the cruise, we will have a special showing on

board of the RSPB's new film to celebrate the centenary "Eagle Odyssey" - all about the life of a pair of Sea Eagles.

We should arrive in Lochranza at about 12 noon and will have 2 hours ashore, giving everyone plenty of time to go in search of Arran's Golden Eagles!

Departing Lochranza at 2pm we will return to Largs via the scenic Kyles of Bute and Tighnabraich, arriving back at Largs for approximately 5pm. Numbers for this trip are strictly limited to 180 people, so it will be a case of first come, first served.

Tickets costing £17 Adult and £10 Child (under 16) are available by filling in the slip below and returning it with your remittance to the address listed below. Tickets are non-refundable.

Further details are available at our new website:
www.narspb.org.uk/cruise



RSPB Centenary Cruise, Saturday 14th August 2004 - Booking Slip

Name:

Address:

.....Postcode.....

Tel: Email:

I would like to purchase Adult tickets @ £17 each
..... Children's (under 16) tickets @ £10 each
Total amount enclosed £..... NB Tickets are non-refundable

Cheques should be made payable to "North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group".

**Please return this slip, along with your payment to
Stuart McMahon, 93 Montfode Drive, Ardrossan KA22 7PH. Tel: 01294 603848**



Wind Farms and Birds

Nigel Wood & Paul Lewis, RSPB, The Lodge

Ardrossan Wind Farm -
Photo: Stuart McMahon



The announcement on Thursday 18 December by the Crown Estate detailing the locations of successful bids for the second round of offshore windfarms, raises serious concerns about their potential impacts upon birds and important marine wildlife habitats.

While the RSPB supports renewable energy including the large-scale development of offshore wind power, as part of a range of measures to reduce the extent of climate change, the Society is calling upon Government to take urgent steps to ensure that the location and scale of individual windfarms that are eventually consented under Round 2 do not pose a significant threat to birds. The RSPB has objected to 26 wind farm proposals (on and offshore) since 1998 and has raised concerns about a further 29. Currently the Society is objecting to a proposed wind farm at Shell Flat off the Lancashire coast as it is home to England's most important flock of wintering common scoters.

RSPB Conservation Director, Dr Mark Avery, said. "An initial analysis of the proposed sites suggests there could be serious problems for birds. We already know that large numbers of red-throated divers congregate in the Greater Thames and off the north Norfolk coast in late winter. Given that most of the earmarked sites are in areas identified by English Nature as potentially being of international importance for wildlife, it is quite possible that detailed surveys could reveal conflicts.

"It is vital that Government collects more detailed data about bird numbers and movements this winter to inform any final

decisions. The RSPB expects Government to stick to its stated commitment to resolving uncertainties about potential impacts upon birds before going ahead with consents. Equally, developers have a responsibility to ascertain the use of these areas by birds as part of their environmental impact assessments.

"While we are keen to see more energy generated from renewable sources we certainly don't want this to be done at the expense of large numbers of birds and important wildlife sites."

There has also been recent publicity about the danger of wind turbines to birds and I thought that it might be useful to try to put some of this into the context of RSPB Energy.

First, only about 3% of the electricity generated for RSPB Energy is from wind. As you will know, the RSPB is very thoughtful about the uses to which land is put and regularly opposes development plans where they think that these might have an adverse effect on migration or breeding sites.

But why do birds fly into objects? Many of us have experienced birds flying into our windows, but the reason for this is clear: they simply do not see them. However, there has been research into power lines, pylons, communication towers and wind turbines, all of which are involved in bird strikes. Various factors affect the numbers of birds flying into these, including visibility, especially at dawn and dusk, the size and speed of the birds, concentrations of species and, interestingly,

the age, experience and skill of the birds themselves. Although the incidence of birds being killed in these cases is distressing, generally it does not have a significant effect on overall numbers. There was a case in Spain, however, where the survival rate of Imperial eagles in the first six months of their lives was increased substantially by removing a power line.

As far as wind turbines are concerned, the RSPB have established that the main problem seems to be on migration routes or where raptors hunt, rather than where birds breed, as birds breeding locally appear to become accustomed to such features. At a wind farm in Minnesota, an estimated 3.5 million birds pass over annually but the fatalities average fewer than three per turbine each year. This is far fewer, for example than in the case of communication towers. Of course, any bird deaths are regrettable and the RSPB shall continue to monitor closely where these occur, continuing to oppose the installation of wind turbines if we believe that these are in unsuitable places.

Centenary events

RSPB South and West Scotland, Glasgow



The RSPB is organising one or two special events in the South and West as part of the centenary celebrations, and whilst dates and details still have to be finalised you might be interested to know that we hope to have at least two showings of RSPB's new Sea Eagle film on Mull and in Oban, in May and July respectively. The Society is also hoping to arrange a local groups' and staff 'get together' in early September. The current idea would be to have various activities, including practical conservation work and surveying, during the day and a barbeque in the evening.

Those not wishing to take part in any practical activities could still come along to the barbeque.

Following the success of last year's Garden Party in the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow, we will be running the event again, on 29 August this year, with a centenary flavour. As before, we will be encouraging local groups to come along and bring a stand, or assist with other activities on the day.

As part of the centenary year we are also running an awards programme to highlight

some of the important conservation work achieved during the last 100 years. In particular, we are currently seeking nominations for the 'Golfinch Award' (for local conservation projects), which is open until 30 June.

You can also enter our 'Goldeneye Award' for wildlife photography, which is open until 30 September.

Full details are in Scotland News (the Scottish Newsletter as was) and on the website at www.rspb.org/scotland.



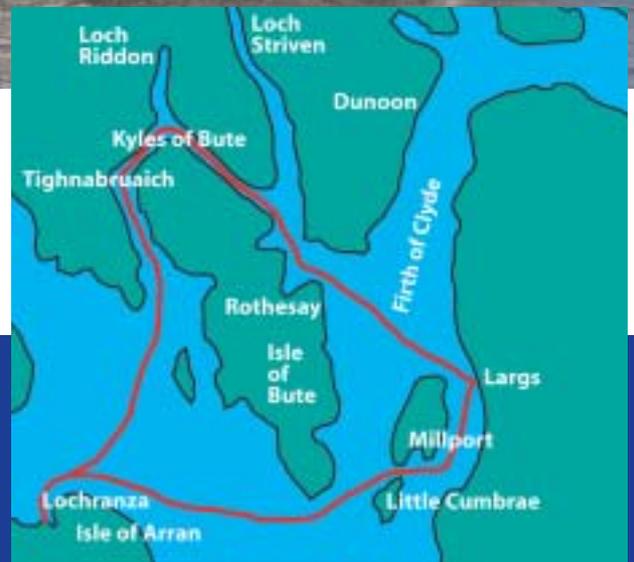
North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group Centenary Cruise



Photo: David Ritchie

on board mv 'Cruiser'

Largs to Lochranza Saturday 14th August 2004



Depart Largs 10am

Special on-board showing of RSPB Scotland's Centenary Film about Sea Eagles - "Eagle Odyssey" and seabird commentary

Arrive Lochranza 12 noon

2 hours ashore with a chance of seeing Arran's Golden Eagles

Return to Largs via Tighnabruaich and the Kyles of Bute

Arriving back approximately 5pm

Tickets:

Adults £17, Child £10

Cheques should be made payable to "North Ayrshire RSPB Group" and sent to:

Stuart McMahon
93 Montfode Drive
Ardrossan KA22 7PH
Tel: 01294 603848

Full information at:
www.narspb.org.uk/cruise



