

Stirling Members Centre Annual Newsletter April 2012 - April 2013

1. Membership

Local membership has increased from 605 in 2012 to 632 households in 2013.

2. Winter Meetings

Our meetings this year have been well attended, 52 were present for the talk given by Anne Chambers and Liz Mills on 'Mountain Flowers'. Three of our speaker's presentations resulted in 'actions':

- Keith Cohen's talk on 'Scottish Bats' included a flowchart which could be used to determine whether the presence of bats would be an issue in planning applications. Subsequently our 'planning group' has successfully deployed it to draw local authorities' attention to cases where protected bats might be endangered.
- During the discussion accompanying Zoe Clelland's (RSPB) talk about the £2m Lottery funded Inner Forth Landscape Partnership's proposals for the upper Forth Estuary, it was suggested that a meeting with local naturalist's representatives should be convened so they could have some input into the planning process. The main concern was that the improved public access to the banks of the Forth envisaged in the plans could endanger the internationally important bird populations found there. A very productive meeting was organised with reps of SWT, RSPB and SOC. A follow up meeting will take place this spring.
- John Knowler's talk on moth recording late in 2011 made us aware of under-recorded areas in Stirling and Clacks. As a consequence we have obtained a grant to purchase a moth trap and generator and in 2013 we will set about trying to fill in some of these gaps in our knowledge.



Moth trapping in Plean Country Park

Next year 2013 -14 the Raploch Community Centre has been booked for our talks on the 1st Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm. There will be an experimental afternoon meeting in January 2014.

3. Walks

A number of walks were run in collaboration with the Callander MC. John Holland specifically organised a visit the Breadalbane Hills to the West of Ben Lawers. This is an area inside Stirling District Council Boundaries but outside the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) and so is represented in Stirling's Biodiversity Action Plan. Guy Harewood Stirling's biodiversity officer together with other Countryside Rangers accompanied members to be shown some of the rare alpine plants growing in the area.

During preparations for a January walk round Stirling University Campus we found that the trees in the 200 year old arboretum had never been labelled. Tree expert Robert Gray kindly agreed to name them and the garden staff are currently busy creating new labels. In spite of initial pitch black clouds and snow flurries 25 members turned up for the walk and thoroughly enjoyed being shown round by Stirling University Nature Society members. During the afternoon the Biology Department put on a display of skeletons of native species ranging from bats to beavers which members had fun trying to identify.

4. Conservation and Wildlife Monitoring

- The group's main practical conservation work involved the removal of the scrub and rank grass which threatens to overwhelm several rare orchid sites. One method of management is to seed the area with yellow rattle which



Strimming Balgair Muir Frog Orchid site

parasitises the grasses and reduces their vigour. This has been particularly successful around our reserve at Cambus where several sorts of orchid have spread in. We have also grown up and planted out rock rose plants in Alva Glen. This is the food plant of the rare Northern Brown Argus Butterfly.

- The group continued its annual monitoring of endangered species at over 30 local sites. At one of these a colony of the diminutive Bog Orchid on Conic Hill appeared to be threatened by the widening of the adjacent West Highland Way and the attention of LLTNP ecologists was drawn to the problem. In Clacks the lack of grazing of the only remaining greater butterfly orchid meadow at Coalsnaughton saw the number of flowering spikes reduced to 1 as scrub overwhelmed the site. On a more positive note a member notified us of a new site of Birds Nest Orchid in a wood at Doune.



Northern Brown Argus (Scott Shanks)

- Our search for an explanation for the decline in the lesser butterfly orchid has focussed on the possible lack of pollinators. Moths are thought to be involved but in two previous summers we have failed to trap any with orchid pollen on them in a large colony of lesser butterfly orchids at Loch Leven. This year with the collaboration of Tim Brain from Fife MC and two Stirling University students Lorna Blackmore and Stuart Bence we caught a Beautiful Golden Y moth with orchid pollen on it. We also marked flowering plants to return later in the season to see if they had set seed and nearly half had succeeded..

- The only place in the entire British Isles where Schleicher's Thread Moss remains is in a spring on the Touch Hills where it has been known since 1880. In 2011 a routine monitoring visit revealed that it has been over-run by rushes and was virtually extinct. The situation was so serious that two of the remaining stems were sent to the Natural History Museum to be kept in culture. Over the last year the site has been visited every month and the rushes and other invasive plants removed. It was a wonderful wet summer for moss growth and by the end of the year numbers had risen from 50 to 1,400 shoots.

- In 1906 an account was published of the plants in Kings Park, an area originally used for Royal hunting. Together with Friends of Kings Park we have resurveyed the flora of the area to find out how the biodiversity has changed over the previous century. Of 209 species listed 100 years ago only 138 have been re-found but 101 new species were also recorded. Many of these were non-native plants that had either been planted around the golf course or had spread in from adjacent properties. One of the sad losses was the wild pansy which has not been recorded since 2007. Originally it was described as 'growing in great profusion over the higher slopes' which sadly are now dominated by scrub, bracken and coarse grasses. The use of herbicides, fertilizers, sophisticated drainage and mechanical cutting on the golf course areas together with a lack of stewardship around the periphery are thought to be responsible.



Wild Pansy extinct in Kings Park

- Unfortunately we had to make a formal complaint to SNH about the invasion of a Site of Special Scientific Interest in Kippen Rait Glen by Giant Hogweed. This highly invasive species has formed an impenetrable forest in a small meadow area where it is destroying a colony of golden saxifrage first recorded there in 1793. SNH advanced a series of technical reasons why they could do nothing about it. We intend to take up the offer to discuss this issue with them.

5. Protecting the Wildlife Interests Associated with Local Authority Planning

- A network of members is in place to screen local Council planning applications for wildlife impact. Our membership also provides a steady stream of issues.

- We have commented on a number of major Stirling and Clacks planning proposals including the Beauly to Denny power line where we hope the planners will avoid sites of wildlife interest that we have pointed out to them. We objected to the Black Devon Wind Turbine application and the Holmehill development in Dunblane both of which were refused .
- There is a number of large forestry proposals in the Ochils at the public consultation phase. We have found it difficult to access details of these plans from the Forestry Commission's Perth and Angus Web site. Representatives of our planning group and SWT Head Office have met with FC officials to resolve this difficulty.

6. Watch Group

Stirling's successful children's Watch Group run by Debbie Spray continues to put on monthly programmes.. They have had problems funding meeting places and so have adopted a mainly outdoor programme.

7. Our Local Reserves

During the course of the year our reserves manager Alistair Whyte left the SWT and has been replaced by Rory Sandison (rsandison@swt.org.uk)

- **Alloa Inch:** (Convenor Roy Sexton). This 100 acre island reserve in the river Forth continues to attract large numbers of geese, ducks and waders. Due to lack of boat availability we were unable to carry out our annual surveys in both 2011 and 2012.
- **Cambus Pools** (Convenor Roger Gooch). Measures are being pursued to stop these ponds from being further overwhelmed by reeds. As a result of funding from The Clackmannanshire and Stirling Environment Trust (Administrators of Landfill Tax) the site has been fenced and subsequently grazed by ponies.

8. The Committee

Thanks are due for the enormous amount of work done by the committee:

Chairman	Roy Sexton
Vice Chairman	Roger Gooch
Treasurer	Liz Albert
Membership Secretary	Jan Harbidge
Committee Members	Tony Rogers , Heather Young , Cameron Rae
Secretary	Sue Sexton (sextonsp@aol.com)



The only remaining site of Schleicher's Thread Moss in the British Isles is this spring in the Touch Hills. The moss nearly became extinct in 2011 when it was found overwhelmed by the forest of rushes which are still apparent in the background. Local SWT members have visited the site every month in 2012 with sickles to keep the spring clear. As a result the numbers of moss stems had increased from 50 to 1,400 by October.