

Orkney Field Club

Founded in 1959

Aim: To encourage the study and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the County



Orkney Field Club is a registered Scottish Charity No. Sc012459

OFC Late Spring and Summer Newsletter 2011

Here is what we have on offer for our members for the remainder of 2011: indoor and outdoor events covering a wide range of wildlife topics, including: Lichens; Birds of Prey; Mosses and other Bryophytes; Bats; Montane, Coastal and Moorland Plants; less well-known Invertebrates; Fungi and Moths and Dragonflies. Of course we will also study and record other interesting wildlife forms we encounter. We are fortunate to have leading experts in some of the subjects being studied, but we are also lucky to have the benefit of expertise very much developed within Orkney and within the Club. We just hope that the weather will be on our side!

OFC Late Spring and Summer Programme 2011

Our Club Nights are normally held in the St Magnus Centre Kirkwall starting at 7.30pm. Non-members are welcome to attend. We charge £1 for members and £2 for non-members to cover the cost of advertising and room and equipment hire. Under-19s are admitted free.

Anyone wishing to take part in our outdoor meetings should phone or e-mail the named contact a few days before the event, but at least a week beforehand if the event involves ferries or shared transport.

On the day please bring warm waterproof clothing and footwear and also refreshment. Using a walking stick (even two for difficult ground) can make walking easier, quicker and safer.

Last minute changes to the programme will, if possible, be notified on Radio Orkney, by phone, on the Club's website and by e-mail (if you have given the contact your e-mail address).

If transport is a problem please call the contact or the Secretary and we will try to arrange a lift for you.

As usual we include the RSPB Local Group (RSPB LG) and Wildlife Explorers' (WEx) programmes.

April

Sun 10th. Durkadale Picnic.

Joint event with the RSPB LG. Our annual maintenance day at the RSPB and OFC native tree plantations and perhaps some wildlife-watching - always an enjoyable event with the picnic the highlight. Contact Jenny Taylor on 851322.

Fri 15th. Club Night – Looking at Lichens.

A two-part session, led by our Chairman, Roger Davies: after a short general talk on this fascinating life-form, Roger will conduct a workshop on the identification of lichens. Please bring specimens if you would like to.

Sat 16th. Rocky Shore Lichens at Yesnaby.

Putting our knowledge gained from the Club Night to practical use, Roger takes the OFC Lichen Group to Yesnaby to study the lichens of a rocky shore habitat. Meet at the headland car park at 10:30am. New members, including beginners, always welcome. Contact Roger on 721395.

E: roger@headweb.co.uk

Sat 16th and Sun 17th. Bag the Bruck.

Joint event with the RSPB LG. After the winter storms many of Orkney's beaches are covered in debris from shipping of all sorts. Much of this, eg, rope, netting and plastic, is potentially lethal to wildlife. Please help us clear our beaches of this debris. The RSPB LG will tackle Waulkmill Bay on the Saturday and OFC will do Marwick Bay on the Sunday. Come any time between 10am and 2pm, as convenient. Gloves and bags provided. Contact the RSPB Office on 850176 or Brian Ribbands (OFC) on 751439.

Sun 24th. Harrier Sky-dancing.

Joint event with the RSPB LG. A guided walk in the Birsay Moors and a visit to the RSPB Cottasgarth hide to watch the spectacular courtship display of the hen harrier and to look out for other birds of prey. Contact Graham and Kathie Brown on 841390.

May

Sat 14th/Sun 15th. The Identification of Mosses.

Following on from the popular event they ran last September, Rosemary McCance and John Crossley will give further tuition on the identification of sphagnum and other mosses.

Contact John on 831507 for details.

Sun 22nd. OFC Lichen Group.

For the group's fourth meeting of the year, Roger Davies will lead an outing looking at lichens at a venue to be notified. The event will start at 2pm. New members, including beginners, always welcome. For details contact Roger on 721395 nearer the time. E: roger@headweb.co.uk

June

Sat 4th or Sat 11th. Recording Orkney's Bats.

Anne Youngman of the Bat Conservation Trust will give a talk on Orkney's bats and explain how to detect and identify them. The talk will be followed by a visit to one or more known bat locations to put our training to practical use. For obvious reasons the event will involve a late night. Booking essential. Contact Anne Gascoigne on 751438 for details and booking.

E: hewin7@btinternet.com

Sat 18th or Sun 19th. Plants at the Margin. (Provisional)

Prof Bob Crawford will show us how the plants of Berriedale and the North Hoy hills have adapted to the marginal conditions. This eagerly awaited event had to be cancelled last year because of appalling weather; so fingers crossed for this year. Contact Dick Matson on 751426. E: r.matson42@btinternet.com

Sun 26th. Summer Flowers at Mull Head Local Nature Reserve

Learn more about wild plants of coast and moorland with expert guides John Crossley and Julian Branscombe. Contact John on 831507 for details.

July

Sun 3rd. OFC Lichen Group – fifth meeting of 2011.

Roger Davies will lead another in his series of outdoor meetings searching for and identifying lichens. Venue to be notified. The event will start at 2pm. New members, including beginners, always welcome. For details contact Roger on 721395 nearer the time. E: roger@headweb.co.uk

Sat 16th or Sun 17th. Orkney's New Damsel.

Following the first recorded sighting in Orkney of specimens of the emerald damselfly at the Rackwick car park pools we will search other pools in the area to see if it has colonised these. We will also look for breeding sites for the 4-spot Chaser other than the one known site and hope to track down the elusive Golden-ringed Dragonfly. Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Weds 20th. Invertebrate Identification Day.

Spend a day in the field, searching for insects and other invertebrates with specialist entomological consultant Dr Peter Kirby. A great chance to improve your field identification skills – and we may even find something new to Orkney! Morning and afternoon sessions. Contact Julian at the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme for details, preferably by emailing julian.branscombe@orkney.gov.uk, or by ringing the Council on 873535. Joint event between OFC, Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre and SFLPS.

Sun 31st July or 6th August. Getting to Know the Dragons of West Mainland.

Many people are unaware of these treasures on our doorstep. We will take folk around the pools of West Mainland where, given reasonable weather, they are virtually certain to see dragon- and damsel-flies. We will explain about identification, life cycle, etc. Contact Brian Ribbands on 751439.

August

Sun 7th. Families Moth Day.

Joint event with the RSPB LG and WEx. As usual moth traps will be set at various locations on the Saturday night and in the morning we will examine the night's catch while receiving expert tuition.

Contact Sydney Gauld on 872468 for details.

Late August or early September another event looking at Bryophytes (Mosses and Liverworts [small non-vascular spore-producing plants often confused with Lichens])

Looking ahead to some of our Autumn events

September

Friday 17th. Club Night. Speaker and subject to be notified.

Mon 19th, Tues 20th & Weds 21st. Fungi Identification.

Expert Liz Holden is coming to Orkney again this autumn, to help us all learn how to identify our amazing range of fungi. Come for either or both of the days, which follow an introductory training session on the principles of fungi ID on the Monday night. Contact Julian at the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme for details, preferably by emailing julian.branscombe@orkney.gov.uk or by ringing the Council on 873535. Joint event between OFC, Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre and SFLPS.

October

Sat 8th/Sun 9th. Berriedale Picnic.

Our annual visit to Orkney's very special woodland in North Hoy. Berriedale can be full of surprises - one year a flock of long-tailed tits. Whatever we do or don't see, this remnant of native woodland is utterly enchanting and full of interest. By ferry to Moaness, minibus to Rackwick, then on foot into Berriedale and back to Moaness. Contact Jenny Taylor on 851322.

Fri 21st. Club Night - Working on the BSBI's Threatened Plants Project – a Botanical Treasure-hunt in Angus and Aberdeenshire.

In July 2009 and again in July 2010, Eric and Aileen Meek spent the four weeks of Eric's RSPB sabbatical working on the BSBI's 'Threatened Plants Project'. The project involves checking known sites for a series of plant species that are believed to be in decline. Following up grid references for the various species took Eric and Aileen to a host of different habitats in Angus and Aberdeenshire from the tops of Munros down to coastal sand dunes. An additional piece of work in 2010 took them to the north Sutherland Coast carrying out Site Condition Monitoring of the Strathy Coast SSSI where their knowledge of that confusing group of microspecies, the eyebrights, was considerably improved – or was it?

November

Sat 12th/Sun 13th. OFC Autumn Ramble.

The elements have defeated us the last few years. We will choose the day and venue when we have seen the forecast (the event might have to be on skis!). Contact Dick Matson on 751426.

Fri 18th. Club Night. Subject and speaker to be advised.

December

Fri 2nd. OFC Christmas Dinner.

RSPB Local Group Programme

Sun 3rd April. Birding by Bus. A coach trip from 10am to 2pm round West Mainland looking at bird hot-spots, hopefully seeing plenty of birds, with a commentary by Eric Meek. Meet at the Ring of Brodgar car-park at 9.50am. Cost: £7- £9 a head. Book with Dick Matson on 751426.

E r.matson42@btinternet.com

Sun 10th April. Durkadale Picnic. See OFC programme.

Sat 16th and Sun 17th April. Bag the Bruck. See OFC programme.

Sun 24th April. Harrier Sky-dancing. See OFC programme. **Sat 28th (Reserve Day –**

Sun 29th) May. Auskerry. By boat to this lovely island with its tern colony and other breeding seabirds. Some interesting migrants could be making a stop-over. Book with Jim Williams on 761317.

Wed 1st June. Into the Deerness Gloup by Boat. A boat trip into the Deerness Gloup, Brough Cave and round Mull Head, Deerness, to see nesting seabirds and spectacular rock formations. Depart from Skail, Deerness, at 10am. Book with Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Sat 4th June. Deerness Boat Trip as above. Depart from Skail, Deerness at 11.45am. Book with Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Sun 5th June. Deerness Boat Trip as above. Depart from Skail, Deerness, at 12.30pm. Book with Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Sun 12th June. Westray Noup Head Loop. A slightly shorter walk than usual up the West coast to Noup Head to see the amazing colonies of breeding seabirds and the growing Noup Head Gannetry. Ferry dep Kirkwall at 9.20am, arr Westray 10.45, dep Westray 6pm and arr Kirkwall 7.25. Book with Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Night of Fri 22nd/Sat 23rd July Storm Petrel Ringing

A night event led by Alan Leitch to watch the catching and ringing of the nocturnal storm petrel and listen to their eerie calls. Book with Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Sun 7th August. Families Moth Day See OFC programme.

Sat 13th August. County Show

As usual the RSPB will have a tent at the show and Local Group members are asked to come and help with the activities for an hour or two between 10am and 4pm. It's great fun! Volunteers please contact Pauline Wilson on 741382.

Sun 11th September To Stronsay for Autumn Migrants

Following last year's super event we are off again to look for migrants on Stronsay – waders, warblers, flycatchers, etc. Book with Dick Matson on 751426.

Sun 25th September To Sanday for Autumn Migrants

Situated just in sight of Fair Isle, Sanday, too, can be a magnet for migrant birds – it certainly was this time last year. Book with Grace Currie on 872742.

For RSPB Local Group events bookings will open on 6th April. Priority will be given to members until 24th April after which non-members may book.

Please book early to avoid disappointment (but not before 6th April).

However booking is now open for the Birding by Bus event on 3rd April.

Orkney Wildlife Explorer's Programme

Wildlife Explorers April - Sat 16th - Bag the Bruck!

Join with RSPB staff and volunteers to keep Orkney's beaches clean for the coastal creatures who live and breed here - and for all of us to enjoy!

Time: 10.00 a.m. – 12 noon **Meet:** Waulkmill Bay, Orphir

Family Friendly, Wet weather gear essential, Stout footwear essential

Difficulty level (2 boots)

Cost: No charge!



RSPB Local Group & Orkney Field Club event

April – Sunday 24th – Harrier Sky-dancing

Time: 09.30a.m. **Meet:** Rendall Community Centre

Family Friendly but children **must** be accompanied by a responsible adult, Wet weather gear essential, Stout footwear essential, Recommended for Nature Detectives

Difficulty level (1 boot)

Cost: To be confirmed

Wildlife Explorers May - Sun 29th - Love Nature at Happy Valley!

Celebrate RSPB's Love Nature Week with us; and when you go down to the woods today, prepare for a big surprise!

Time: 2.00 – 4.00 p.m. **Meet:** At Happy Valley Car Park

Family Friendly, Wet weather gear essential, Stout footwear essential, Recommended for Nature Detectives

Difficulty level (1 boot)

Cost: £1 for members, £1.50 for non-members

Wildlife Explorers - June - Sun 19th



Midsummer Magic with the World Heritage Site Rangers at the Ring of Brodgar

Time: 2.00 – 4.00 p.m. **Meet:** At Brodgar Car Park

Family Friendly, Wet weather gear essential, Stout footwear essential, Recommended for Nature Detectives

Difficulty level (1 boot)

Cost: £1 for members, £1.50 for non-members

Orkney RSPB Field Teacher event

July - Sun 17th – Rock-pooling – go on, get your hands in the water and see how many spectacular sea creatures we can find!

Time: To be confirmed **Meet:** Brough of Birsay car park.

Family Friendly, Recommended for Nature Detectives

Difficulty level (2 boots)

Cost: £1 for members, £1.50 for non-members

Contact: Sue Whitworth: 751201

Orkney RSPB WEx joins an RSPB Local Group & Orkney Field Club Event

August – Sun 7th- Mysterious Moths

Experience Orkney's amazingly beautiful moths close up

Time: To be confirmed **Meet:** To be confirmed

Family Friendly, Wet weather gear essential, Stout footwear essential, Recommended for Nature Detectives

Difficulty level (1 boot)

Cost: £1 for members, £1.50 for non-members

Orkney Skate Trust

Orkney Skate Trust has just formed, to study and conserve one of the world's rarest fish – the flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius*. The sea around Orkney waters is one of the two remaining British strongholds for the flapper skate.

The flapper skate used to be known as the common skate. 'Common skate' have been suffering a catastrophic decline, and recent studies have indicated that the 'common skate' actually represented two very similar looking species – the blue skate and the flapper skate. The latter is the species found in Orkney waters.

These skate grow to a great size, up to 2.5 metres long. They are usually bottom-dwelling, feeding on a wide range of fish, crustaceans and shellfish. However, they have a relatively low reproductive rate, with their large 'mermaid's purse' egg cases being destroyed by dredging and trawling, and the juvenile and adult fish also being very vulnerable to trawling operations. The species used to be a focus for some fisheries, but as it has become much rarer, it has still been prone to being caught as by-catch. As a result, flapper skate are becoming extinct over most of their former range.

The International Union for Nature Conservation considers the species to be Critically Endangered. As such, the IUCN consider it to be at a greater risk of global extinction than the blue whale or giant panda.

We in Orkney have an international responsibility to do what we can to understand and protect this fish.

The OST is focussing on raising awareness of the species amongst divers, anglers and commercial fishermen, whilst also developing a catch-mark-release programme to increase our knowledge of their movements and survivorship around Orkney. The Trust hopes to ensure that skate conservation becomes a priority in marine management issues around Orkney.

Records of flapper skate – whether of live animals, live egg-cases or old egg cases washed up on beaches – are vital. People are encouraged to send their records direct to the OST, or to the Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre. All sea anglers are being encouraged to submit records of any fish caught which have been tagged previously and they are being trained in how to tag flapper skate and release them unharmed.

OST members can attend training sessions on the *Welcome Home* which the OST is chartering from the Orkney Sea Angling Association.

The Orkney Skate Trust is trying to raise awareness of the conservation issues surrounding this species. Membership of OST is free. To join, a form can be downloaded from their website, or requested by emailing mail@orkneyskatetrust.org.uk, or Chairman Dan Wise can be contacted by writing to OST, 14 Hillside Road, Stromness KW16 3AH. Please join, and get involved in the Trust's vital marine conservation efforts.

Stoats – help needed!

2010 saw the mysterious appearance of stoats in Orkney, with sightings from various parts of West Mainland, Burray and South Ronaldsay. This was a great concern, as this predator – whilst native to mainland Britain – has never been known to Orkney, and is considered likely to have a serious effect on our important concentrations of ground-nesting birds, and our unique population of Orkney vole *Microtus arvalis orcadensis*.

Scottish Natural Heritage, in partnership with the SSPCA, RSPB and Orkney Field Club, started a live-trapping exercise in autumn 2010, in response to this identified threat. Since then, two stoats have been trapped in South Ronaldsay, and one between Kirkwall and Finstown. All have been transported to Fife, where they have been released by the SSPCA.

However, sightings have continued. It would appear that a number of individuals are still at large, and whilst there is still a chance of stopping the establishment of this species in Orkney, the next year or so will be critical. Help is needed from OFC members in order to make this trapping exercise a success.

If you see a stoat, or hear of poultry being found dead with head wounds, please contact Scottish Natural Heritage or the Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre immediately. If landowners give their permission, trained volunteer trappers can place live traps in suitable positions in the area of sightings, in the hope of trapping the individual or individuals.

Efforts are being made to obtain more humane live traps, but there is a need for more volunteers to come forward to be trained in setting and checking the traps. The traps must be visited daily, and if a stoat is caught, the local SSPCA officer will attend to collect the animal so it can be moved for release in its native range in mainland Scotland. Anything else caught in the traps will be released.

To offer your help, please contact Scottish Natural Heritage on 875302, or contact the OFC Secretary on 751426.

Membership

Membership renewal was due on the 1st January, anyone not renewing before the 30 April will no longer be eligible for any further publications.

To renew your membership, return the membership form, sent out with the last newsletter.

You can also download a membership form from our website:

www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/FIELDCLUB/

Please Enter the Dates of Events Which Might Interest You in Your Diary or on Your Calendar NOW!