



LANARK AREA MEMBER CENTRE BULLETIN
ISSUE 44: DECEMBER 2011

WELCOME

Welcome to the December issue of the Lanark Area MC's bulletin 2011, which contains articles of general and local interest, updates on talks, events, etc. I hope you will all contribute news and events to future bulletin editions. Send any articles, photos and ideas to postmaster@lanarkswt.org.uk.

Upcoming events

Don't miss the annual **Members' Night** where we'll have some short talks from members and some mulled wine and mince pies.
7.30pm, Tuesday 13th December, St. Nicholas Church Hall, Lanark

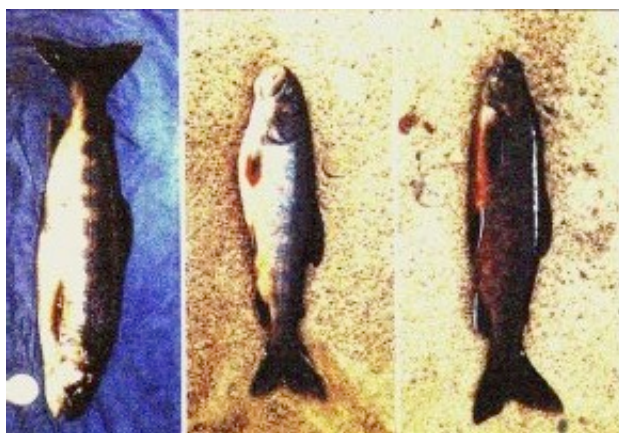
and in the New Year:

Darwin's fishes - the diversity, evolution & ecology of the Arctic charr

7.30pm, 31st January 2012, St. Nicholas Church Hall, Lanark

by

Prof. Colin Adams, Scottish Centre for Ecology & the Natural Environment at the University of Glasgow



Charr morphs/University of Glasgow

Other news

Highland cattle help butterfly habitat

The Allt Mhuic Nature reserve has reported a significant increase in butterfly numbers this summer, and a big cause is its highland cattle grazing programme. The highland cattle can do much to the ground where machines would not be able to function. The reserve is Scotland's first butterfly reserve, and was set up by the Forestry Commission in partnership with Butterfly Conservation and Forest Research seven years ago. It's on the north shore of Loch Arkaig north of Fort William, and aims to support a variety of butterfly species, particularly the nationally important Chequered Skipper. As part of the project, the reserve pioneered a conservation grazing programme to improve habitat, but by 2009 it was apparent that the scheme wasn't going according to plan and butterfly numbers were still declining. Since then the grazing regime on lower slopes has been changed from summer to winter grazing and early indications are that butterflies are benefiting. Increases in numbers include the chequered skipper, dark green bordered fritillary, small pearl bordered fritillary and the speckled wood. Other insects such as dragonflies are also showing increases in numbers. This is good news, given that almost three quarters of UK butterfly species have declined in abundance over the past decade.



Chequered Skipper/UK Butterflies

Decline of Scotland's seabird colonies

Many of Scotland's internationally important seabird colonies continue to have poor breeding seasons. In a study by RSPB Scotland, many of the biggest population declines are in the northern isles. For instance on the Orkney reserves, there have been significant drops in the populations of Arctic terns and kittiwakes, and a colony count at Marwick Head has shown that the colony has declined by more than half since 2000. Guillemots and kittiwakes failed to produce a single chick at Noup Head on Orkney. On the North Hill reserve breeding pairs of Arctic skuas were down by nearly half, and the single remaining breeding kittiwake pair failed to raise any young – there were once more than 150 kittiwake pairs here. Gale force winds in May particularly affected terns in the Western Isles and Inner Hebrides. There was a bleak picture on Shetland too, though one highlight was 15 occupied burrows of Leach's storm petrel at Ramna Stacks & Gurney, the only RSPB site where these storm petrels are found.

On the east coast the picture was more improved from last year, though there is still an overall decline in kittiwakes and guillemots over the decade, with guillemots declining by two-thirds at Troup Head on the Moray coast since 2001. The Society advises a thorough census of all seabird colonies in order to determine the causes of these declines and discover means of protecting these species.

Source: BBC



Leach's Storm-petrel, Unst, Shetland - <http://alastairwilsonphotos.blogspot.com/>

Pygmy sperm whale strands in the Firth of Lorn

A very rare cetacean, a pygmy sperm whale, stranded near Ellenabeich on the Isle of Seil in October, only weeks after the first UK sighting of a dwarf sperm whale off Cornwall. These two whales were originally thought to be the same species until the sixties, which is testament to their rarity and difficulty in identifying them at sea.

Despite the unfortunate stranding, this therefore represents a unique opportunity to learn more about this elusive species – only three have ever stranded in Scotland, the first of which occurred in 1999. A necropsy performed at the Scottish Association of Marine Sciences has shown that the sub-adult male was healthy and would have been alive when it stranded, and it is unknown why the animal stranded. Pygmy sperm whales are very similar to their larger cousins, the main difference being one of size – they only grow to 3.5 m maximum, compared with 18 m for sperm whales. This specimen was originally mistaken for a dolphin or porpoise from afar.

Source: Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust



<http://john-humphries.blogspot.com>

Hen harriers thwart wind farm

SSE, formerly Scottish and Southern Electric, have withdrawn its planning application to develop a 29-turbine wind farm at Waterhead Moor near Largs, which was originally submitted seven years ago. Though the site was deemed to excellent in terms of wind resource, most of the proposed wind farm falls within a Special protection Area, designated for its importance for hen harriers. The RSPB has said they are encouraged that the withdrawal highlighted the environmental importance of the site.

In other wind farm news, the John Muir trust has objected to plans to construct 43 wind turbines near Ardgay in Sutherland, on the grounds that the Wind Energy development is close to an area that could be designated wild land in the future. Whilst the development of renewables can be seen as a step in a green direction, the placement of wind developments in particular remains controversial.

Source:BBC

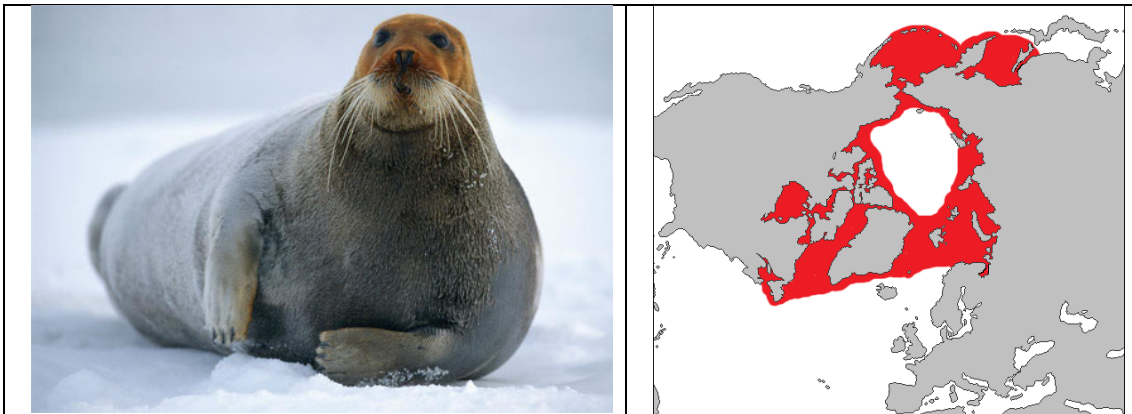


Press Association

Bearded seal visits the north-east

A bearded seal was spotted at the St. Cyrus National Nature reserve in autumn. Bearded seals usually live in the Arctic Ocean along the coastlines of Europe, America and Asia, and spend the winter in heavy offshore ice, being a primary food source for polar bears. They grow to 2.7 metres in length and weigh from 275 to 340 kilograms. The name refers to the seals most characteristic feature, the long and very abundant whiskers or vibrissae. Bearded seals are rare vagrants to the UK, generally sighted every two to three years in northern Scotland

Source: SNH



Bearded Seal/NOAA; distribution/Wikipedia