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TENTSMUIR NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER No. 27

JUNE 2012

Hi and welcome to the summer edition of the Reserve Newsletter and lo and behold it is sunny! After the wettest April on record it's great to see the sunshine and the countryside with that fresh green look.

Looking back one year, I notice my newsletter introduction mentioned last April was the driest on record and now we have had the wettest on record, from one extreme to the other.

Thanks to everyone who completed one of our forms for our Behavioural & Attitudes Survey. Phase One was completed over Autumn and Winter 2011 and we are about to start Phase Two over this Spring and Summer.

Bearded seals, a very rare visitor but what do they eat and how?

Have you spotted Tipsy yet or know about the history of a worked pebble?

Have you observed any of the new and rarer species observed on the Reserve or spotted a white-tailed sea eagle, otter, lapwing, smew, cuckoo for example?

As well as the annual Family Day event in July, with Forestry Commission Scotland we will be holding several more events over the summer months. Read on inside.



Natterer's Bat – Image kindly provided by Gavin Johnson

Tom Cunningham

Reserve Manager

THE NEW RESERVE PLAN 2012 to 2022

The next Reserve Plan is being developed which will include the 25 year vision for the NNR however, we have several more meetings with our specialists and advisors to discuss the next Reserve Management Plan for the following ten years. We will also be holding an open meeting locally for you to have your say. We hope to involve everyone who has an interest in the Reserve and we will be looking for your views. Watch out for more details in the coming month

TENTSMUIR NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

BEHAVIOURAL & ATTITUDES STUDY

Phase One of this study has been completed and we have received the report from Rob Robinson Heritage Consultants. First of all we are delighted with the huge response from visitors.

The survey methodology aimed to obtain a good balance between observing sites, times of the day and phases of the tide, albeit with a focus on rising tides. During the times of observation (40 days in total) an effort was made to note every person/group that entered the Reserve – only those on the NNR were recorded. In total, some 652 groups comprising 1,572 people and 569 dogs were recorded.

The survey has provided a comprehensive sample of wildlife disturbance and visitor attitudes towards wildlife conservation and disturbance at Tentsmuir NNR. The survey also provided an excellent overview of the profile of visitors and the nature of visits to Tentsmuir NNR during the autumn and winter seasons. It has to be said that a lot of the success of this was down to you, the visitors, for taking time out to complete each survey and of course to Eve Schulte who excelled in carrying out the surveys. Our thanks go to Eve and to Rob for producing a very good report.

Phase Two of monitoring visitor behaviour and attitudes starts now, looking at the seasonality of the different wildlife interests being affected i.e., to determine impacts upon ground nesting birds, sea birds, pupping common seals as well as disturbance to the seal haul out sites. We will collect data from the surveys over a four month period through to September, recording visitor behaviour, recording in detail any visitor behaviour causing disturbance or likely to cause disturbance to wildlife and a note of the impact of that disturbance.

You may be asked by Kirsten Campbell, another wonderful volunteer on the Reserve, who is contracted to carry out the face-to-face surveys and observations. As well as the survey work Kirsten will be doing, visitors can pick up the short self completion questionnaire from three locations around Tentsmuir Point. I hope you will take part. There is a prize of an exclusive tour of the Isle of May NNR at stake. The winners of Phase One will take their trip over the summer months.

The full report will be available on the NNR website later in the year.

TENTSMUIR POINT

THE DYNAMIC COASTLINE

After the winter storms and spring high tides the coast line has changed yet again although mostly in a positive manner this time. The foreshore has thickened up dramatically and the sand that was blown away in land is already greening up with the sand sedge (*Carex arenaria*) rhizomes sending out the almost straight lines of fresh growth. The southern area is still progressing seaward.

On May 24th while we were out looking for an abandoned campfire (grrrrr) near the dune edge, the tide was at its lowest for the month and the Abertay sandbar was exposed for miles out to sea. A quite amazing sight as the early mist was burning off by the sun and the sand was yellowing as it dried and the sea sparkled like gems.

MANAGEMENT

I recently completed the six year annual review which was a comprehensive evaluation of all the annual budgets and all the management tasks from the last Reserve Plan (2005-2011) that were programmed and the success of everyone one of them. We were quietly satisfied. However, we do not rest on our laurels and we look forward to managing the next ten year Reserve Plan.

Bob Ritchie and Mikey Smith and their team re-built the south sea fence during late Spring and due to the sandbar shift, were able to extend it. Hopefully this will help to keep the cattle inside the Reserve this summer. The team also repaired sections of the north sea fence. That's it for another year.

Grey squirrel control was successful with none trapped or observed in the Reserve and only nine trapped in the forest. This reflects the success of this management. The red squirrels hopefully will continue to thrive.

Crow control was again successful and this reflects in the success rate of the ground nesting birds. We were especially pleased to see lapwing and shelduck on the Great Slack, at the moment though I don't know if they nested or not.

The herbicide programme to spray our target species on Tentsmuir Point and along Tayport Heath will start shortly. We maintain the open heath and the sequence of dunes by spraying mainly the pine, birch, willow, gorse, rosebay willow herb and clumps of creeping thistle from seeding and spreading.

EDUCATIONAL VISITS

Since the start of April we have enjoyed the visits from Tayport Playgroup to Morton Lochs, a weekly visit which we assist every month. Ferryport Nursery also enjoyed their visits and finding out all about the secrets around the Reserve.

WILDLIFE UPDATE

I bumped into a couple of Norwegian lads at Fetterdale and what an interesting discussion we had. Tron worked for the Department of Ecology and Natural Resource Management at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and he was amazed that the Bearded Seal (*Erignathus barbatus*) had been observed on Tentsmuir Point and Tayport Harbour. Tron said that they are rare visitors to Norway as they don't normally come that far south! He revealed that they have very small teeth and do not eat fish; instead they feed on mussels by sucking the insides out! Tron was one of the expert advisors on the recent beaver release in Knapdale.

Other species around at the moment include white-tailed sea eagles (2), ringed plover (two scrape nests with eggs found recently), red breasted mergansers, eider duck, long-tailed duck, cormorant, dunlin, redshank, curlew, oystercatcher, grey plover, buzzard, kestrel, peregrine, green and great spotted woodpeckers, skylark, swallow, sand martins and swifts amongst the many species. Take time out just to listen to all these birds. Butterflies had a very poor start with the cold wet weather in April and are slowly increasing in numbers small copper, small white, small heath, green-veined white, orange tip and peacock are around.

The colourful green woodpeckers are easily recognised by their laughing "yaffle" call throughout the Reserve and forest and this is one sound I love to hear.

Take a look around the foreshore and wind blowout sites and see the vigorous growth of the long lines of sand sedge on the foreshore and in the windblow sites through the dune edges. See how this plant grows and how it starts to stabilise the dunes. Also out at the moment are the fluffy seeding creeping willow (*Salix repens*) ready to blow on the next wind.

Kirsten Campbell will undertake a National Vegetation Classification & a Rare Plants survey on Tentsmuir Point over summer.

DID YOU KNOW & OTHER SNIPPETS

Well done to long term volunteer Andrew Ford who was awarded the Kings Award for Dedication from the University of Aberdeen's Student Association for the work carried out for the First Aid Society. Andrew also created the first aid website for the society. Andrew is keen on everything in the natural world and is involved in many other activities at the University, with the RSPB, the Scouts and his summer work carrying out ecological surveys throughout Scotland. Andrew also is contracted to carry out the monthly hydrological data collection around Morton Lochs for us.

Keith Partridge, who is an extraordinary cameraman and who has filmed all over the world, was the cameraman who filmed the Tentsmuir NNR production in 2003. Keith is part of a team climbing Mount Everest and of course filming the expedition all the way. On the 23 May the team reached Camp 4 on the South Col, the camp before the final push to the summit. **UPDATE: Exciting news, Keith and the team reached the summit early morning of 25 May 2012, congratulations on a fantastic achievement.**

And of our congratulations go to Eve Schulte for getting a job working with the RSPB. You might of course still see Eve at this year's Family Day Out – Natures Olympics.

MORTON LOCHS

MANAGEMENT

The boardwalk up to the Railway bird hide on the south loch rotted in places and we decided to replace it. Since the footpath and boardwalk is normally a very damp area and wet in places we decided that a recycled plastic type would be fit for the site. The boardwalk was constructed inside a week and now makes the walk up a bit more pleasant.

You may well have seen all the trees that we cleared from the footpaths and car park lying abandoned, well some of these have been put to a good use. The Tayport Playgroup needed a nice little local garden to play in and learn all about nature and were able to get this little haven created by the Fife Council Payback team (low level offenders who commit minor crimes). The group cleared out the overgrown garden and created seating, benches and stepping logs from the large trunks of the felled trees. Thanks to Forestry colleague Graeme and Alex for cutting the trunks up.

Contractor David Mackie will start the extensive herbicide programme shortly on the bracken, and other target species throughout the site and spraying the phragmites on both the north and south lochs.

WILDLIFE UPDATE

The wildlife around the Lochs has certainly picked up this month with orange tips emerging, small copper, small white and green veined white butterflies around. One recent couple to the north loch had an excellent observation when they spotted a pair of cuckoos. Another regular visitor observed the otter pair for over 15 minutes swimming and larking about on the north loch.

In this edition a report kindly provided by Les Hatton and Gavin Johnson:

Bats in Tentsmuir a study by the Fife & Kinross Bat Group

The first bat boxes were put up in Tentsmuir as early as 1985, and unusually for bat boxes (which can often take some years for bats to find) were an instant hit with the local bat population. Since that time the boxes have been monitored most years, and have contained pipistrelles (our smallest bat) and the rather scarce Natterer's bat. Very occasionally a brown long-eared bat is found but this is the exception rather than the rule as this species lies large properties with big open roof spaces.

In 1998 a ringing programme of the Natterers was started, mainly to find out more about how long they lived, and whether or not the two groups based in separate parts of the forest (the westenders and the eastenders) mixed together. The bats were handled under licence as they are protected species.

Since the start of the ringing there have been nearly 1400 handlings of individual bats and a number of interesting facts have come to light. Firstly there is surprisingly little mixing between the two groups, and although occasionally one will be found the wrong side of the tracks, generally they seem pretty clannish. Secondly, they live a long time. Many of the original group ringed in 1998 were adults when they were ringed, but exactly how old they were at the time we don't know.

Since then, in most years, some of that original group have turned up in the boxes, and during our most recent visit this May (2012) T6934 was hanging around the icehouse boxes, having first been ringed as a breeding female way back in August 1999.

The boxes are usually checked twice a year, once in spring to check the returning adults, and once in the late summer to check how many young have been born. The May visit took place on a fine day, but during a month that had been very cold, wet and windy overall and preceded by a pretty ropey April too. As a consequence only twelve Natterers were found, of which three were new bats. These three were all males hanging out together. The table below shows the year of original ringing of the twelve bats found on the 5/5/2012.

Ring No.	Original Ringing Date	Age	Sex	Location
T6934	1999	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6453	2007	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6576	2010	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6596	2011	Adult	F	Beeches

Y6608	2011	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6616	2011	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6629	2011	Adult	M	Icehouse
Y6634	2011	Adult	F	Icehouse
Y6636	2012	Adult	M	Icehouse
Y6637	2012	Adult	M	Icehouse
Y6638	2012	Adult	M	Icehouse
Y6513	2010	Adult	F	Icehouse

As can be seen from the table most of the bats found came from the east end (Icehouses), with only a single "west end" bat. Most of the bats found were juveniles ringed last summer (2011).

Overall the number of bats found was low suggesting that many were still in transitional roosts, or perhaps in some of the big stag headed pine trees.

Unusually we also found over 200 very cold and sleepy soprano pipistrelles in the boxes, sometimes in ones or twos but more often in groups of ten or more. At this time of year they would normally be expected to be in nice warm lofts enjoying the benefits of a cosy relationship with someone's central heating. It is very likely that the cold spring just hasn't let them move into the big maternity colonies yet and this could be an issue with getting the single pup born and on the wing and looking after itself in time for the autumn.

HISTORY

I bumped into Jeannie Cooper a first time visitor to Morton Lochs a few months ago and she revealed the following fascinating story:

"What a wonderful place Morton Loch is, it was the first time I had been and will visit again. The woodlands have a more ancient atmosphere than the large Tentsmuir plantation and it was great to see natural species being planted. A couple of years ago I found a 'worked pebble' on Broughty Ferry beach and took it to Dundee Museum (at the time I didn't know what it was - but it looked interesting). After a series of investigations by the Edinburgh archaeology specialists it turned out to be an important enough artefact to declare it as Treasure Trove because they believed it to be from the Tentsmuir/ Morton area of early settlement, possibly from Neolithic times (although they were unable to date it with any specificity). The Ancient History Curator at Dundee Museum suggested it could have been used as a nut cracker! However, the actual use wasn't identified. Anyway, walking around Morton Loch made me think of the people who used to live there and the interpretation boards made that even more interesting. Keep up the good work,



The worked pebble – Image kindly provided by Jeannie Cooper.

VOLUNTEERS & VISITORS

The volunteers at Tentsmuir NNR (as you well know by now) are a superb group of people, without them we couldn't possibly carry out the entire species recording, management tasks and many other projects.

Expert birder Bill Alexander who has carried out the Tentsmuir Point north transect is recuperating after a minor op. Get well soon Bill, and at long last it might be time to get your feet up for the next couple of months.

WHAT'S ON

FAMILY DAY OUT - Thursday, 5th July 2012 - "Natures Olympics" a great day out.

The thirteenth free annual NNR event will be held on Thursday, 5th July and it should be another exciting day out. The event will be based around the nature of Tentsmuir Point and link in with the Olympic year and a hint of time travel. Hopefully everyone will learn more about the Reserve and be encouraged to do their bit for biodiversity everywhere.

The new style shorter activity sessions will continue, so cram as many of the activities in and learn all about the flora and fauna and what goes on in the Reserve. So please be patient, enjoy, learn and try several different ones. Each activity will last 20 to 30 minutes; you finish one and then move onto the next one. Staff and volunteers will help you move on.

In addition to the short events and activities in store for you, we will have a special guest to entertain you Eve Schulte who will weave her great storytelling adventures of Topsy the adventurous little red squirrel..

- The activities will be Olympic theme based for example Grasshoppers for Gold and will be revealed on the day.
- The viewpoint telescopes and all the staff and volunteers will be running the activities and will be happy to answer your questions and help you enjoy the day out.

With the exception of the £2 charge for the car park, it's all free! (It's now £2 at the barrier, please have change ready.)



Topsy & Dr Moo – the start of the adventures

There are 120 places available and the event books up fairly quickly. I also keep a reserve list, as there is usually a visitor or two who may have to cancel suddenly. If you are unable to attend after booking, please contact me as soon as possible to let me know, so I can call and let someone else take up your place. **Please don't let me or other visitors down.** Remember all children must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

To book, please phone my office telephone and if I am not in, please leave a short message on the answer machine, with your name and telephone number and I will contact you to confirm the booking. If I do NOT contact you, you are not on my list!

SUMMER EVENTS: Holiday Fun at Tentsmuir

Along with the Forestry Commission my colleague Alex Easson and I will be holding joint events through July and August on the following dates. There is no need to book for any of these events just turn up in the Forestry Commission car park at Kinshaldy (£2 charge at the barrier). As it may well be sunny and warm I would advise bringing your own refreshments particularly water and juice.

Bring your children to Tentsmuir Forest during the summer holidays for great family days out and to experience the fun and excitement nature has to offer. Keep your eye out for posters around the car park and on the reserve sites.

We will be running events in and around the car park and picnic area between 12.30 pm and 3:30 pm on the following dates:

Thursday, 26th July 2012

Nature Explorer Day on Tentsmuir Point through the forest

Be prepared to walk approx 1.5 miles through the forest and dunes up to Tentsmuir Point and all the way use your I Spy skills and see if you can complete the local I Spy sheet.

- Test your navigation and ID skills as you make your way through the forest to Tentsmuir NNR
- Eye Spy!

Thursday, 2nd August 2012

Habitat day

- Find the clues in our treasure hunt
- Build a bird box
- Nature dials
- Build a bug house

Thursday, 9th August 2012

Red Squirrel Activity Day along with Sophie Lockwood the Red Squirrel Officer who will also have other groups coming along to display their activities.

- Follow the squirrel quiz trail
- Guided walks
- Lots of other stuff as well but no one has told us what it is yet.

IRRESPONSIBLE VISITORS

Fife Council in conjunction with the Police has launched a new initiative to catch irresponsible dog owners and posters and cards have been distributed in all the towns and villages. Basically anyone can contact them on 08451 550022 and provide information leading to the identification of the dog owner. Let's hope we can help catch the culprits.

UPDATE: It just gets worse and worse, the dog poo around the Morton lochs car park and footpaths is disgusting. The irresponsible dog owners just do not care that other visitors particularly the young nursery children who are using this lovely area to learn about nature!

What do these people think they are doing?

BIG THANKS

I had a great response to our plea to receive an electronic copy of the Newsletter which helps to reduce our carbon footprint. I would ask those who can, to request an electronic copy of the Newsletter. Please email me if you are able to receive an electronic copy as this will reduce our paper usage, photocopier use and postage. Also please remember if you change your email address to let me know. A few people must have changed recently as I did get some failure to deliver messages.

Many thanks to all who contribute to the Newsletter and the valuable data collected for our flora and fauna records and to the local newspapers for articles.

Enjoy your visits to all the sites in the Reserve. Take away only memories and images and leave behind only your footprints.

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PS After the angst of a dreadful season the mighty Raith Rovers finally got their act together and avoided relegation. And now a summer of relaxation before next season begins ... bring it on.

Be aware of ticks in the UK countryside and elsewhere in Europe. This is a message from all the responsible environmental organisations in the UK who are aware of the rise in the number of ticks in our countryside. All visitors to our countryside should really examine themselves and check for ticks as soon as you can. If you do happen to have one attached remove it as soon as you can. To guard against ticks: Keep trousers tucked into socks and wear light coloured clothing. Examine your body for ticks in the backs of the knees, groin, under the arms and on the scalp. Dog owners should also check their dogs. Stay safe, be aware.

Useful websites: www.snh.gov.uk, www.nnr-scotland.org.uk and www.tentsmuir.org for information on the Reserve and surrounding area as well as our work in SNH.

Keep up to date on our Facebook page  "Scotland's National Nature Reserves".

Have a look at www.placebookscotland.com and put your own images, stories and poems on this new website, it's yours to use and put all your favourite places on it, including Tentsmuir NNR!