

# PERTH CENTRE

## NEWSLETTER

### NOVEMBER 2009

Charity No. SC005792

Jackdaw

#### LODGERS IN THE LUM

Perhaps surprisingly, I can spend less time in summer looking for our wildlife than I do in other seasons. Certainly, this year some time was spent away to account for that difference. But rather than write of foreign affairs, I want to write of things closer to home, and you can't get much closer than . . . the house, itself. Two years ago my memory suggests that jackdaws were numerous in the nearby quarry, and rooks were in the nearby den, and all was tidy. Last year a pair of jackdaws set up nest in one of my chimneys. Unfortunately, first choice was one in use. Forgetting that this might be the case, on impulse I lit the first fire of the winter, and sent the nest heavenwards in a shower of sparks. The jackdaws merely shifted one stack along. Corvids are not noted (pun intended) melodious songbirds but I have grown used to, and welcome, their chack-chack. There is a warmth detectable in the welcome tone that one will give to one returning. The softer 'kow-kyow' can be quiet, but still easily heard when broadcast from the rooftop. I perceive a hard edge to crisp information given in conversation that precedes an action such as hopping from the stone ledge onto the stack, and maybe to roost on the nest, or before launching into an enviable glide and flap to the fir. A definite harsher 'chack' greets an intruder, who, I speculate, in early September, might be a fledgling being told his birth nest is no longer his home. It has become a pleasurable accompaniment to tasks in the garden to hear this chatter, and to stop what I was doing to watch their antics; and, later, a pleasurable chat to hear echoing down one of the chimneys as I sit inside. I find jackdaws to be smarter (in appearance, corvids generally being smart, or clever) than rooks and crows, dressed in lush, deep piled grey ruff and black body. They have a pleased, satisfied, proud look. Their bright, handsome appearance and carriage would not suggest the worst of their omnivorous feeding habits; butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, or chick down stick to their beaks, as it would to the crows, or to the whiskers of the neighbours cat. Since the arrival of my lodgers I have become increasingly aware of the 'chack-chack' around me. I hear them in the village, not just in the quarry; I hear them in Perth; I went to Montrose basin, and along with 2,500 pink-footed geese, I watched two jackdaws seeing off a herring gull from a desirable bit of muddy gravel. For many people watching birds began with the bird table, here, it has continued with the chimney. *Jeff Banks*

#### CONTACT US

As membership of SWT has reached 35,000, it is not surprising that the part of that membership that would be served by the Perth Members Centre numbers hundreds. This makes communication difficult – out with this newsletter. The Committee would be pleased to hear from members on any matter; do you have a problem impinging on wildlife, do you think the Members Centre could be doing something that isn't, do you want to enrol some help with a project, - anything else? Contact me or a committee member. Or use this newsletter as a vehicle. Jeff Banks, Chairman, 01738 85490, [Jeffreybanks@btinternet.com](mailto:Jeffreybanks@btinternet.com)

#### BIODIVERSITY IN TAYSIDE

Next year is the International Year of Biodiversity. That b word is coming of age. What does it mean to you? Is it just the portion of wildlife out there on our doorstep, and, therefore, so familiar that we take it for granted and it is really of little significance? Yet our Councils are charged with specific duties with regard to biodiversity, and few are meeting those requirements. We welcome Catherine Lloyd to speak to us On 'Biodiversity in Tayside' on 6<sup>th</sup> November.

#### WHALES, DOLPHINS AND PORPOISES

The first two, at least, seem to have some attraction for most people; animals that most of us rarely, if ever, see, and are certainly unlikely to get very close to. Is it the fascination of sheer size, or the communication skills or pleasing acrobatic displays that excites our empathy? Dr McLeod from Edinburgh will speak to the joint meeting with Perthshire Society of Natural Science on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

#### BLUEBELL WOOD BIRDS

Not such a good breeding season this year in the nest boxes; lack of defoliating caterpillars may have made life difficult for newly fledged young. Nine clutches of **Blue Tit** eggs were laid; one of these, probably, a replacement for a predated clutch. Another was also predated, and one deserted. Altogether 88 eggs were laid, of which 31 were lost, as above; the remaining 57 fledged 52 young. The predators were probably grey squirrels – two nests being found in bird boxes. Three pairs of **Great Tits** laid. Clutches of 8 and 10 successfully fledged 18 young, but the third clutch was deserted. No **Tree Sparrows** nested in the Bluebell Wood.

In the nearby Muirton Wood, 21 eggs from two pairs of **Blue Tits** fledged 18 young. Only one pair of **Great Tits** nested, with 8 eggs producing 7 young. The **Tree Sparrows** situation was complicated. Six boxes were utilised, 48 eggs laid, and 31 young fledged. Two boxes were entirely unsuccessful – 2 eggs deserted: 3 laid, 1 hatched, later died. One box had a single clutch of 5, resulting in 3 young. Two boxes each had two clutches, one began about a fortnight later than the other initial clutches, and possibly a repeat laying of one of these two failures. Eventually 13 young were reared from 20 eggs laid. The final box had three successive clutches, with 14 eggs fledging 13 young. As all these Tree Sparrow boxes are situated in a strip of woodland only about 40m. long, it's not obvious why there should be such variable breeding results.

**BOTANICAL OFFERING** – *Birds' Nest Orchid* still flourishes at Scone, with most spikes in the original area, rather than that of the last two years. Only four *Coralfoot Orchids* were found at Monk Myre. The area of *Twayblade* in Muirton Wood, Blairgowrie, was less extensive than previously. At Haugh of Kercock only four flowering plants of *Dropwort* were found. Here, four plants of *Chicory* were seen in the original area by the pond; but one was found almost a mile away, at the side of the access track. *E. D. Cameron*

## A FROZEN START

At minus one this morning it will not be the most comfortable of visits. Clearing the windscreen did manage to warm me up a little. There was no one to greet me as I arrived at the Cuilc today. A thin covering of ice lay over the west end of the Cuilc while the remaining area is like a mirror. It is perfectly still and I can see nothing at all on the water this morning, not even the noise of my vehicle arriving has prompted any thing to investigate the possibility of food. I notice a couple of Moorhens under the cover of some overhanging branches an adult and a juvenile slinking about in the shelter afforded by the trees.

Walking in the direction of the Golf Club I catch sight of eleven Mallard and Two Tufted Ducks moving further round the Cygnets come into view, so all is well with the Swans offspring. They never seem to move far from each other.

The yellows and gold's of autumn beneath my feet and are building up into a nice little carpet of leaves. Above the canopy is opening up and if there was anything in the trees I would be able to get very good views. A pair of Jays drop down into an evergreen and are out of sight very quickly. They didn't stay long before making off somewhere else. I hear briefly Chaffinch and Blackbird. Looking up a flock of Siskins are on the move and Fieldfare numbers are on the increase. Two Deer take a stroll across the road onto the golf practise range. The sign on the gate says "Please Close The Gate" so why I think has someone left it open. I can't help myself and so walk over to close it. Pulling the gate to I find it cannot be secured as the catch has broken. Still it might stop the draught. A pair of Mallard's are on the small pond maybe the same pair I noticed last week.

A Carrion Crows shouts but no reply is heard. The morning flypast is very sparse today possibly I'm out of sync since the clocks have changed. Blue Tits and Great tits, are joined by a Coal Tit as they search for food. A Wood Pigeon fluffs up against the cold but remains silent. Mind with the temperature at minus three now who would feel like singing. Singing in the rain is one thing, but slipping on the ice carries with it the distinct possibility of ending up flat on your back so I take more care of where my feet are going than throwing my voice about and I feel sure the birds will be on the same wavelength.

Starting up the car I drive past the practise green, the two Deer I observed earlier give the vehicle no more than a passing glance and continue to eat. The cloud formation over Pitlochry still takes my breath away but the sun is warming up and slowly the clouds disperse. Up over Pitlochry the temperature is still at minus three degrees in spite of the sun's efforts. The Black Grouse, there are twelve of them this morning have the Lek to themselves today and just get on with doing what they have to do. The Jays are popular this morning as I watch another two flying into the woods. A pair of Mistle Thrush are up and off and then nothing.

As I make my way back in the direction of Pitlochry I notice something flying about on the Heather. Pulling into the conveniently placed lay by I train my binoculars on to a Stonechat. Beautiful, I watch this little bundle of energy for what seems like ages as it flits from one heather shrub to another. Finally it lands on a hand written sign warning motorists of "Lambs Crossing" As it goes through a preening routine I scan around to see what else is about, when I look back it's gone. I can hear the flapping of wings but see nothing, then on the ground by my front window I see the Stonechat. It appears to be everywhere and moving about very fast a vehicle makes a great hide but there are of course blind spots.

After a short while I realise there are now two Stonechats, both are so it seems quite comfortable being close to the vehicle I manage to get some very close views of both birds until another vehicle drives by and they leave. On the way home I pass large flocks of Rooks in the fields. I notice the temperature is now zero degrees but it's still a little cold for me. A quick chorus of freeze a jolly cold fella and so say all the birds and then breakfast is calling, followed by a seat in the warm and a read of the Sunday papers. *Mike Conlon*

## SWIFT DIARY

The first swift I saw this year was on May 9. A bird entered one of my nest sites on May 10 and two pairs entered their specially made nest holes on May 14. This is about the average time for their arrival here and for their nest accommodation exploration. The entrances to the nests are about a yard apart (*I refuse to give in to saying metres!*) and I will call one couple pair A and the other pair B. With the sites being occupied roughly at the same time, surely the egg laying and hatching and the fledging and departure would be almost simultaneous! However, this was not case! Pair A fledged and the young left by the end of July and one adult was observed entering its nest at dusk on August 4. This was the last sighting of any of the birds from pair A. Nearly every evening from then on I watched the return in the late evening of pair B. It was fascinating to see them swoop in as darkness approached – each evening about two minutes earlier as daylight shortened then hearing them screaming inside the nest. On August 24 the pale face of a youngster appeared at the entrance hole and was there every day until the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month. This was also the date of the last sighting of the returning adults and I thought what remarkable parents they were to continue to feed diligently when the urge to migrate may have been almost compelling. The family must have departed early on the morning of August 30. This is very late for the species leaving and I would be interested to know if there have been any other late departures noted. Also any members interested in taking part in a simple swift survey in 2010 please contact me at (01738 552972) or [cemacpherson@supanet.com](mailto:cemacpherson@supanet.com). *Charlie Macpherson*

## INDOOR PROGRAMME FOR 2009-10

Friday, 6th November: Cath Lloyd, "Biodiversity in Tayside".

Friday, 4th December: Joint Meeting with PSNS - Nikki McLeod 'Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in the Firth of Forth'.

Friday, 15th January: Iain MacGowan, Scottish Insects.

Friday, 12th February: Alistair Godfrey, "Perthshire Wildflowers".

Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> February: Moira Hutchison, "Wildlife of Antarctica".

*All meetings in Luncarty Church Centre, starting 7.30 p.m. apart from joint meeting with PSNS in Perth Museum.*

## SWT PERTSHIRE CONTACTS

**Aberfeldy:** Tim Fison (01887 877207). **Perth Centre:** (Newsletter, etc.): Charlie Macpherson (01738 552972); (Secretary): Moira Hutchison, Lismore, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3HU (01738 828750). **Pitochry:** Beryl Coope (01882 634224). **Upper Strathearn Group:** R. Fryer (01764 670526).

**BAD NEWS** – Members are reminded that we incur costs for the use of the Luncarty Church Centre - please be generous with your donations!