



BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

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Within Scotland, it is thought that there are between 20,000 – 25,000 animals ranging in varying densities across a wide range of habitats from the North coast through to the border with England. Variation in density exists due to Scotland’s complex and heterogeneous geography in terms of land use, topography, climate, and human population density.

Although badgers are neither rare nor endangered in Scotland at present, they are under increasing threat from the expansion of urban areas and changes in land use. Current knowledge of species distribution is based on surveys carried out a number of years ago. The charity ‘Scottish Badgers’ identified the need for a robust nationwide survey to provide:

- an estimate of distribution across a range of habitats in Scotland,
- a baseline from which to monitor future change,
- sound scientific information to inform policies relating to badger conservation and disease control.



Eurasian Badger *Meles meles*

SCOTTISH BADGER DISTRIBUTION SURVEY

Elaine Rainey

The Eurasian Badger *Meles meles* is a member of the Mustelid family, extending in range from Western Europe across Asia to Japan.

In the UK, the Badger is an iconic species in the public’s eyes as it is the second largest mammal after the deer species, and the largest indigenous species of the Order Carnivora (although they are in fact omnivorous).

The Heritage Lottery Fund and The Scottish Executive are funding the three-year Scottish Badger Distribution Survey (SBDS), running from 2006 - 2009. The SBDS aims to survey a random stratified sample of one thousand 1km squares ...

Continues on page 3



Notes from the Chair

What a wonderful summer. I hope that for those of you who have been out recording in the field, be it professionally or privately, it has produced interesting results. Butterflies in the garden with me

have been spectacular on a number of occasions and we seem to have had more leverets around than in previous years. It has been such excellent weather that I have been making the most of being outside virtually until the sun started going out of sight, which has done nothing for the desk work.

One down side has been the departure of our Wildlife Projects Officer, Claire McSorley, who has left to follow her partner to Lochgilhead. Claire did a fantastic job in getting the project up and running, working with our funders and sponsors, Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, Stirling, Falkirk and North Lanarkshire councils, BTCV, and Falkirk Environment Trust. The activities and events she organized have been a resounding success and I hope that we will have the first year's report on the web site shortly. A huge thank you to Claire for all her work and an invitation for her to stay in touch with BRISC as a member in her own right! Recruiting for her replacement, with BTCV, to conclude the last year of the project, is well underway.

We have not got as far as I had hoped with implementing the Business Plan, but we now have a small working group to take it forward and to see if we can bring in adequate funding to allow us to retain a project officer, preferably full time, to manage the suggested projects and administer BRISC. This would give us greater continuity and provide a longer term prospect to the appointed person.

I attended a meeting of the NFBR (National Federation for Biological Recording) during September. I do find this a useful means of staying in touch with southern/national matters in the recording scene. They are still leading on the formation of a Local Records Association, which I hope will provide a strong voice for the LRCs once it is operational; a constitution is in the process of being worked up for consideration at the moment. I understand that a desk instruction is being produced by SEPA for 'working with the NBN Gateway'.

Patrick Milne Home
September 2006

Deadline for inclusion in the January 2007 issue of *BRISC Recorder News* is 16 December 2006.

Please email all material to Anne-Marie Smout at my new email address anne-marie@smout.org or post to BRISC, c/o Smout, Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, KY10 3DZ



Editorial

A reminder to all our readers that the Scottish Biodiversity list of critical species, which was published earlier in the year, and much else is available from the Scottish Biodiversity Website at www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/

Although the nights are rapidly drawing in, with the usual decline in insect life, there is still plenty for the biological recorder to get stuck into: Volunteer for the new Badger survey to help chart their distribution – and possibly ward off any culling of these animals. There is still time to take part in this year's 'Living with Mammals' survey: call the Mammal Trust on 020 7498 5262 to get your free survey pack. Contact your local Bird Recorder to offer your help with one or more of the many bird surveys on the go; many bugs (Heteroptera) hibernate and can be 'swept' from plants or trees over winter, and we shall all need to look out for the rapidly spreading Harlequin Ladybird (see article on page 5). Or why not take up the study of Bryophytes or Lichens? Winter is a good time to begin. I have just invested in a compound microscope with exactly this intent!

The 23 September was National Moth Night, a yearly event since 1999, and I trust all moth enthusiasts had their trap out and will now take the trouble to submit their records to the scheme on the official recording form available from www.nationalmothnight.info

Our series on 'What's special about...' this time takes us to the Aberdeenshire coast, where Nick Littlewood expertly introduces the reader to a number of immensely interesting wildlife sites. There is much for anyone to learn and enjoy, including those of us who might consider themselves fairly familiar with this area.

Which reminds me to ask for more offers of contribution to this series – or for that matter of any other relevant articles to *BRISC Recorder News*. No need to be shy!

Anne-Marie Smout

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WEBSITE - For the *Members Only* web pages use

Username **crex**
Password **corncrake**

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from across Scotland, with the assistance of a network of volunteer surveyors. Surveyors will be required to identify the presence or absence of badger main setts, signs of badger activity and evidence of human disturbance to setts. The findings will be gathered together and extrapolated (based on land use/habitat type) to give likely density in any given area.



Badger tracks

It is imperative to the ongoing success of this survey that the methodology is both robust and repeatable. For this reason Scottish Badgers have teamed up with statisticians to ensure the development of a quality sampling strategy/survey design, and to ensure the survey yields statistically valid results, which are interpreted in the correct manner. In addition, Scottish Badgers will be conducting one-day briefing sessions for volunteers, with the aim of ensuring standardisation of survey procedure and to reduce discrepancies due to recorder effort.



Badger scratch marks

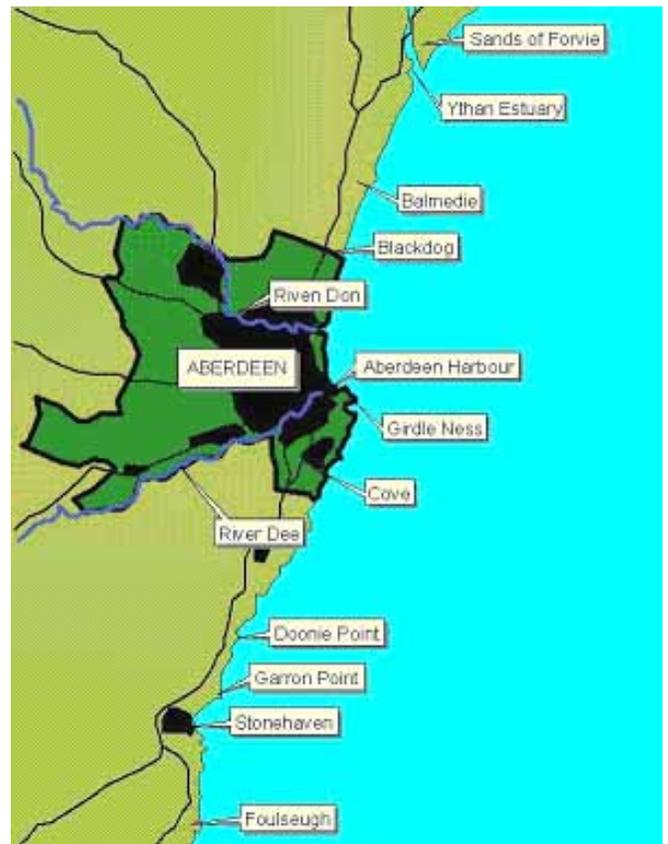
Briefing sessions will be taking place across Scotland early 2007. The survey will commence in September 2007, running through to April 2008. Quality checks will be conducted the following winter 2008 / 2009.

For more information on the Scottish Badger Distribution Survey, visit www.scottishbadgers.org.uk or contact Elaine Rainey, Survey Co-ordinator at elaine@scottishbadgers.org.uk or on 0131 657 4125.



WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT ABERDEEN'S COAST?

Nick Littlewood



Aberdeen markets itself as 'The Energy Capital of Europe' and to many the image conjured up is of a bustling and functional service centre. For many naturalists (myself included in the past), Aberdeen is a stop on the way to Shetland or Orkney and little more. However the habitats and wildlife along the coast to the north and south and even within the limits of the city are spectacular. Whilst there is the odd well-known place along this stretch, including the nature reserves at the north and south extremities of the area described, much of the coast is under-explored. The main A90 route from Dundee to Aberdeen and north to Peterhead remains sufficiently inland of the coast for its entire route that inquisitive car-based travelers are given no hint that there is much worthy of investigation. However, determined naturalists, who are prepared to explore off the beaten track,

can gain access quite easily to much of the coastal zone and will be well rewarded for their efforts.

Contrasting Coasts

The north and south coasts of Aberdeen differ markedly. Aberdeen Harbour, through which the River Dee flows out to the North Sea, marks the boundary between rocky shore and cliffs with stony bays to the south and the unbroken 22km sweep of sandy shore to the north all the way up to Sands of Forvie NNR. For most of this distance, north from the mouth of the Don, the beach is backed by active sand dune systems.



King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* Photo the author

Masses of Sea Duck

The shallow waters off Blackdog and Murcar host internationally important numbers of sea duck. The bulk of the Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* from the Ythan Estuary drift down to this stretch after breeding and number can top 5000. Additionally three different King Eiders *Somateria spectabilis* have joined the flock at various times in 2005 and 2006 with a drake looking set to become a regular feature. Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* are present year round but reach their highest numbers, usually between 2000 and 4000 birds, in June or July with post-breeding dispersal from Iceland. Velvet Scoters *Melanitta fusca* are present in smaller numbers, up to around 500, and tend to peak a little later; usually in August. Each summer a handful of Surf Scoters *Melanitta perspicillata* join the flock with the four birds in 2006 being about par for the course. However these are usually only seen with the aid of a good telescope, a calm sea and much patience.

Dolphins in the Harbour

The entrance to Aberdeen Harbour is a very reliable site to watch Bottle-nosed Dolphins *Tursiops truncatus*. The car park at Torry Battery, on Girdle Ness, provides an ideal vantage point. At times very close views can be had of animals entering the out part of the harbour though sightings around or just outside the outermost breakwater are more frequent. The animals are present year round and there does not appear to be any strong pattern to their appearance except, perhaps, a slight bias for afternoon sightings.

Other sea mammal sightings are surprisingly frequent along this stretch of coast, especially along the rockier southern part. White-beaked Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* are seen most often in the summer, especially along the coast from Aberdeen south towards Stonehaven, while Porpoises *Phocoena phocoena* can be seen at any time. There are

several sightings most years of Minke Wales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* – even from Aberdeen's Beach Boulevard, whilst Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*, Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus* and Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* have all been seen from Girdle Ness. On a smaller scale, Common Seals haul out among abandoned shopping trolleys on sandbanks on the River Don, especially on the island just upriver from the A956 road bridge.

Miles of Beaches and Sand Dunes

Balmedie County Park, equipped with car park, visitor centre, boardwalks and marked trails, and a ranger, attracts the most folk. However the whole stretch north from Donmouth is well worth exploring for the more adventurous. The sand dunes system is impressive and contains a rich array of dune species. Butterflies present include Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja* and the nationally declining Grayling *Hipparchia semele* whilst larvae, pupae and adults of Six-Spot Burnet moth *Zygaena filipendulae* provide an abundant source of colour. Inland from the dunes the landscape is largely a farming one interspersed with landfill sites in various stages from active to filled and landscaped. However there are notable highlights such as the coastal heath of the Blackdog Rifle Range with its Rabbit grazed Gorse *Ulex europaeus* topiary and the meadows and marshes in the slacks north from Balmedie. Areas of bushes and scrub anywhere along this coast attract migrant birds with scarce warblers such as Yellow-browed *Phylloscopus inornatus* and Pallas's *P. proregulus* being of annual occurrence in recent years. Again exploration away from the beaten tracks is often the best bet for the most exciting finds.

Spectacular Rocky Coast

Many places are marketed on 'come and see the puffins' but how many cities can make such a claim? Yet a small number of pairs are thought to breed within Aberdeen in cliff-top burrows between Girdle Ness and Cove. The remainder of the coast south to Stonehaven provides a magical mix of cliffs, gulleys, stony bays and rocky shores. Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* and Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* breed in small numbers along much of this stretch and a handful of Black Guillemots *Cephus grille* breed at Muchalls. However numbers of most species reach their impressive peaks at Fowlsheugh RSPB reserve. The reserve celebrated its 25th anniversary this year and is set to expand to take in more cliffs to the north. A full colony count this June produced totals of 59,050 Guillemots *Uria aalge*, 5,240 Razorbills *Alca torda*, 636 pairs of Fulmar, and 15,550 pairs of Kittiwakes. The reserve has not been hit by the catastrophic breeding failures experienced in recent years at some other colonies, and visitors are free to take in the spectacular sights without being hemmed within 'crowd barrier' fencing as is necessary at more popular southern sites.

Ythan Estuary and Sands of Forvie

Thanks to the adjacent University of Aberdeen field station, and in contrast to the remaining coast described in this article, the Ythan Estuary and surrounding dune systems have been extensively studied by scientists and naturalists of many disciplines. This attention is well deserved. The Sands of Forvie is the fifth largest sand dune system in the UK and may be the least disturbed. Hence it hosts some exceptionally well

developed plant communities including Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*/lichen heath and Creeping Willow *Salix repens*/Crowberry/Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* dune hollows. Britain's largest colony of Eider ducks breeds within the dunes and the estuary hosts a high density of waders and waterfowl. These features have been written about extensively elsewhere and interested readers should contact SNH or call at the NNR visitor centre near Collieston for further information.



Dickie's Bladder Fern *Cystopteris dickieana* Photo Heather McHaffie

Fantastic Floral and Faunal Finds

Exploration of nooks and crannies along the Aberdeen coast can reveal some highly significant national rarities. Dickie's Bladder Fern *Cystopteris dickieana* was first described from the coast south of Aberdeen and still maintains a presence at Cove, one of only five hectads for the species in Britain. The Small Blue Butterfly *Cupido minimus*, now lost from many former haunts, was present until recently at Doonies Point, south of Muchalls and may still hang on there. Garron Point, north of Stonehaven, has recently been found to be one of the best areas in the UK for the globally scarce Narrow-mouthed whorl snail *Vertigo angustior*. At Fowlsheugh, the moss *Sanionia orthothecioides* was discovered in 2005. This is mainly a species of northern and western rocky islands. As well as this being the most southerly record, Fowlsheugh is one of perhaps just three mainland sites.

There are undoubtedly many exciting finds remaining to be made despite the proximity of this coast to a major city. Pressures of coastal development provide a constant threat and such discoveries are never more important than now. This section of coast is, undoubtedly, special. Do explore it, report your sightings, and help to keep it that way.

Contacts

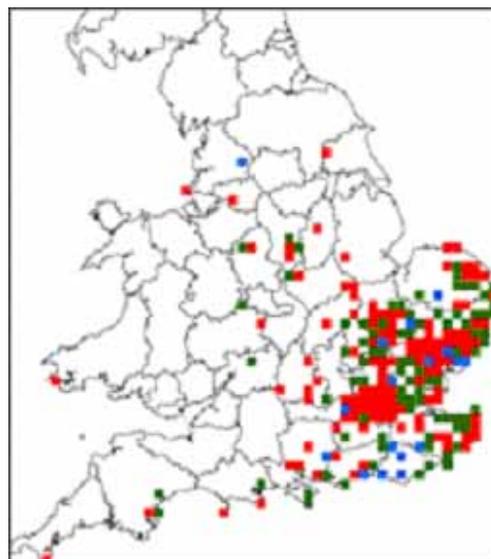
- Records are collated by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC). Contact 01224 273633 or go to www.nesbrec.org.uk. NESBReC produces a twice-yearly email newsletter for recorders and past issues are available online.
- The *NE Scotland Bird Report* is available from Dave Gill (email: dave@drakemyre.freemove.co.uk).
- East Grampian Coastal Partnership brings together organisations and individuals with and interest in the coast between Fraserburgh and the river North Esk. See <http://www.egcp.org.uk/index.html>. This site also provides details of land and boat-based cetacean watches.

HARLEQUIN LADYBIRD – Latest news

Readers will remember that an article about this newly arrived invasive species appeared in *BRISC Recorder News* No 57 (April 2005). As always back numbers can be viewed and downloaded from BRISC's Website www.brisec.org.uk

Prof. Majerus, who has been studying ladybirds for many years, was recently speaking on BBC4's 'Today' programme about the rapid and worrying spread of this killer ladybird and the problems which it is likely to produce, both for other ladybird species and for people. The Harlequin *Harmonia axyridis* larvae are spiky, unlike those of our native species, and so more of them survive, being better protected from predators. The adult attacks and kills not only other ladybirds but all sorts of other insects too. In North America, where it is now a serious pest species, having been introduced there some years back to combat greenfly, it has developed a habit of invading houses in great hordes and Majerus mentioned that a number of people had been hospitalized following allergic reactions to their bites. I have personally also been told of people having to resort to vacuum cleaners to get rid of the worst of them from their houses.

This sounds like something out of a horror movie!



Latest distribution map of the Harlequin Ladybird *Harmonia axyridis* – not far from Scotland now! [Lifted from the Harlequin Survey website] Red dots 2006, Green dots 2005, Blue dots 2004

Visit www.harlequin-survey.org/ to read more about this invasive and potentially very unpleasant insect and – if you get the black/white version of *Recorder News* - to see the map in colour.

LRC News

The Take a Pride in Fife Environmental Information Centre (TAPIC EIC)

Improved availability, accessibility, and a growing demand for environmental information in Fife has led to an expanding and constantly evolving role for our centre. To reflect the scope of our services and responsibilities, the Fife Environmental Recording Network (FERN) has been renamed the Take a

Pride in Fife (TAPIF) Environmental Information Centre (TAPIF EIC). We are looking to raise awareness of the wider range of services and data holdings available while closely aligning ourselves with the overall TAPIF brand.

The Take a Pride in Fife initiative and its associated partnership of national organisations, local groups and individuals (the TAPIF Environmental Network) act as primary driver of environmental action in Fife. Covering a range of themes from community action to climate change, the initiative seeks to deliver co-ordinated on the ground action to improve Fife's environment.

TAPIF EIC is committed to work in partnership with local people and environmental organisations to encourage and co-ordinate systematic recording of the environment and provide this information to all with an interest. While remaining committed to this goal TAPIF EIC's remit also includes the primary - and crucial - information support-role to assist in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the numerous environmental projects and policies within the TAPIF initiative.

In the last couple of years our customer base has grown as Strategic Environmental Assessment has been introduced, and TAPIF has gone from strength to strength. Our role in developing TAPIF and measuring its progress is vital to its ongoing success. Recent projects include producing the annual State of the Environment Report for Fife, developing an information database for Strategic Environmental Assessment, and developing biodiversity measures for Fife Council's Environmental Policy.

Further information regarding the services provided by the TAPIF EIC can be obtained by visiting our website at <http://www.fife.gov.uk/tapifeic>

Simon Scott

CARSE data to go on the NBN Gateway

CARSE (Central Area Recording Scheme of the Environment) closed in 2004 and since then BRISC has looked after the records dataset until a suitable solution could be found to make the data available once more. Earlier this year the NBN was approached to see whether it would be possible to make this dataset of over 100,000 records available on the NBN Gateway. As a result the data will be uploaded to the Gateway during October 2006; however, due to problems with the metadata, access to the dataset will be limited initially.

Craig Macadam

NEW UP-LOADS TO THE NBN GATEWAY

Trevor James, NBN Officer for National Schemes and Societies, has taken on the role of releasing notices of datasets being made available through the NBN Gateway and has informed BRISC that the recent update to the Gateway (13/9/06) includes one entirely new dataset:

- Neuroptera (Lacewings), Megaloptera (Alder Flies), Raphidioptera (Snakeflies) and Mecoptera (Scorpion Flies): the dataset used for the production of the Provisional Atlas, published by BRC in 1994. All data are freely available for viewing and download at 100m resolution, including full details.

The Gateway update also provided updated datasets for the following:

- UK Ladybird Survey
- UK Bryophytes
- UK Hoverflies
- Marine Life data from MarLIN
- Seasearch Marine Survey data from the Marine Conservation Society

WILDLIFE COUNTS PROJECT – First Annual Report

The first year of the Wildlife Counts Project has undoubtedly been a great success, due to the magnificent efforts of Claire McSorley. 21 practical workshops had been run by mid September with 174 individuals attending one or more workshops. Individual events concentrated on particular taxa, with the most popular workshops being on wild flowers, where a further two workshops had to be put on to satisfy demand. The events took place within the three local authority areas of Falkirk, North Lanarkshire and Stirling, but people attended from much further a-field as can be seen from the map below (copied from the report). 80% of attendees were new to recording and the feedback was very positive, with 99% feeling the workshops had met or even surpassed their expectations. 251 records had been submitted by mid-September with more being promised.

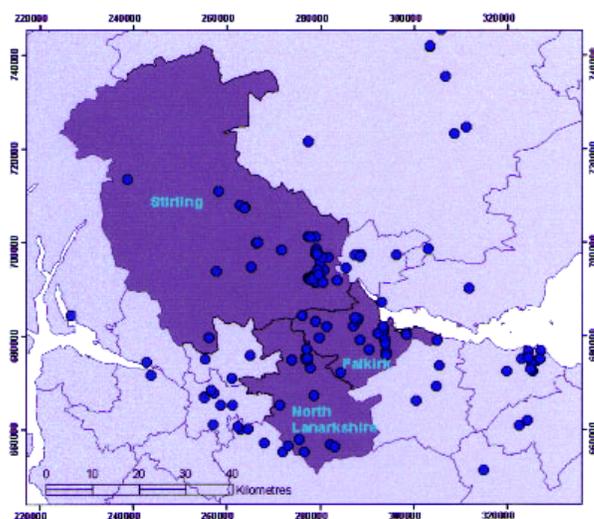


Figure 4 A map of Falkirk, Stirling, North Lanarkshire and surrounding areas people who attended workshops (N=174) shown as blue dots.

Events within Stirling had the biggest attendance, while those arranged for North Lanarkshire had the smallest, with one course having to be cancelled due to lack of numbers. One reason for this may well have been the difficulty of getting from place to place by public transport, e.g. to travel from Motherwell to Cumbernauld by public transport takes two hours! This problem will have to be taken into account when next year's programme is planned.

It is now vital to keep participants' interest alive over the winter, and to this end, a full day's recorders' forum has been planned for 3 December at Carronvale House, Larbert, to allow attendees and potential attendees to get together, to hear

a range of talks and to share experiences. The forming of local 'Recorders Groups' will also be raised. Copies of the First Annual Report will be made available on BRISC's website.
Anne-Marie Smout



BOOK REVIEWS

**Shaw, P. & Thompson, D.B.A. (eds.) (2006) *The Nature of the Cairngorms: Diversity in a changing environment*. The Stationery Office Limited, Edinburgh. © Scottish Natural Heritage.
ISBN 0 114 97326 1; hbk £20.00.**

In 1998 I trekked up to the Pools of Dee to try (unsuccessfully) to repeat an old water bug record. I have been reminded of this and other recording excursions into the Cairngorms while reading this remarkable book which so well deserves the superlatives printed on its back cover. One's own modest explorations, although not without physical effort at the time, are nothing compared to the realisation that nearly every square metre of these high mountains and extensive forests has been crawled over in the search for rare fungi, lichens, mosses, vascular plants, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and the freshwaters sampled for fish. The results of these surveys are here summarised, more or less selectively, along with chapters on habitat and other aspects of the earth and life sciences. Such a huge effort has, of course, involved armies of specialists and (as with so many biological publications these days) a squadron of thirty-five contributors to the actual writing of the book. The superlatives continue: its 444 pages weigh nearly 3kg; all the photographs – many taken by Lorne Gill of SNH – are outstanding; the species and subject indexes comprehensive; the glossary is excellent and absolutely essential for a book with so many unfamiliar scientific terms, ditto the list of acronyms and legislation; and the gazetteer seems faultless. This includes OS grid references for about 500 place names with references to a specially drawn map of the area.

As to the contents, in many ways the book follows the usual sequence of descriptions about a chunk of Britain, beginning with geology, landforms and soils, followed by habitats (uplands, forests, farmland, freshwaters and fens and lowland bogs), interleaved with chapters on landscape character and land cover change. These are in Part One: *Elements of the Natural Heritage*. Part Two is headed *The Nature of Change* where some general remarks on climate are located away from the normal order so as to encompass some iffy conclusions about climate change. This part

includes chapters on deer management and recreation. Part Three *An Overview* has just one concluding chapter. Inevitably this arrangement of the book as a whole results in some repetition, such as statements about replacement of heather moorland by semi-natural forests. There seems also to have been a tediously bureaucratic instruction to authors to provide tons of statistics giving the difference in the area, species number or whatever between the area of the Cairngorms National Park and a wider Cairngorms area which, essentially, this book is about. I doubt whether such comparisons will be of lasting interest and am glad that the Editors dispensed with them in their final chapter on *Patterns of species diversity*. Incidentally, it is not until one reaches page 402 in this chapter that one comes across a summary of *Methods and criteria used to identify species-rich habitats and areas*. Possibly this is referenced elsewhere but if so I must have missed it as these methods are critical in understanding many of the facts and figures given in earlier chapters. Also, although probably unavoidable, it is surely sad that contemporary conservation writing has to be so stuffed with acronyms: BAPs, ESAs, IBAs, NWMs, SACs to mention just a few of the better known ones.

Regarding writing styles and subject matter, it might have been nice if the enjoyably colourful writing of the *Introduction: a sense of being in the Cairngorms* could have been sustained in later chapters. Readers will home in on their own preferences and perhaps few will read every page. Some of the early chapters are a curious mix of highly technical writing requiring fairly constant reference to the glossary, yet with explanations of the obvious and some tricky inclusions, such as the difference between *Lapetus* on page 15 and *Iapetus* on page 23 (possibly my eyesight or a printing error). Yet one can track backwards and forwards from the Subject Index to the footnote on page 61 and the later five pages of references to find out exactly what the term Semi-Natural Woodland comprises without becoming entirely clear whether it is more than a category derived from a study of aerial photographs. The chapter on Landscape Character has little not written elsewhere and some of the other 'habitat' chapters, although essential in content, are somewhat plodding. However, full marks to the chapters on Fens, Fungi, Lichens, Bryophytes and Vascular Plants. These pages glory in the wonderful richness of the area and reveal many delightful details, such as the photograph of two species of rare *Tetraplodon* moss found on a fox's poo. Incidentally, every chapter has a masterful summary of rare species, important areas for species diversity, recent research findings, trends and future management needs.

Anyone would have found trying to cover all invertebrates in one chapter a mammoth task and the two authors have performed a miracle of synthesis within their own considerable spheres of expertise. But for sure there is much here barely touched on. For example the References do not include Garth Foster's *Atlas of Scottish Water Beetles* (SNH, 2001) to check on the status of *Ilybius wasasterjerna* (listed as *Agabus*). Although this is categorised as Data Deficient, Foster's atlas summarises the species as 'vulnerable'. Until recently, it was known only as a sub-fossil in Shropshire until found in small puddles below the root plate of fallen trees in three 10km squares in Abernethy Forest. If this reads as

grinding too small in a review, the point has to be made that the massive task of summarizing data on invertebrates in twenty-five pages, is surely disproportionate to allowing a whole chapter to just seven species of amphibians and reptiles and about forty-five pages to birds (albeit probably justified by the main interest of most readers). The chapter on fishes has much of interest about lampreys and the one on mammals a surprising lack of data about bats.

About the layout and binding, the decision to go for a landscape format (25mm high and 28mm long) obviously has clear advantages for photographs and huge tables but this makes the book awkward to put on a shelf and, for such a heavy volume, having the hinge on the narrow dimension, has resulted in the back cover of my copy already beginning to come unstuck. This is an outstandingly good book about an exceptional important area but readers unfamiliar with conservation generally in Britain should be cautioned against hyperbole about the Cairngorms. It would be unfortunate if the statement that “the Cairngorms area is the most important in Britain for nature conservation” was quoted out of context. Although in a sense, any such comparisons are fairly meaningless, it has to be realised that the Cairngorms area as described in this book is about 250km from east to west and about 170 north to south and if one drew a line around a similar sized area in several other parts of Britain, say the whole of the East Anglian fens or the whole of the New Forest plus the Isle of Purbeck westwards to the Chesil Beach, in their way they could claim equal importance for British nature conservation. But these are relatively small complaints about such a hugely interesting book at such an incredibly modest price. There are so many lovely truths to discover. For example, one cannot improve on the statement that “lack of data is particularly acute in mountain areas where an ageing population of voluntary recorders is most obviously challenged.”

Thomas Huxley

- **RSPB Highland Group (Third edition). *The top 52 birdwatching sites in the Highlands - including two new sites and many revisions.* RSPB. pbk. ISBN 1-901930-41-6. £3.50. Available from the RSPB.**
- **SOC Scottish Borders Branch (2005). *Birdwatching in the Scottish Borders.* pbk. 74pp in full colour. Free. Available from Tourist Information centres and Ranger Service**
- **Scourie Wildlife Group (2006). *Wildlife of Scourie.* pbk 78pp with many colour illustrations. £4.50 – available from Ian Evans, Calltuin, Nedd, Drumbeg by Lairg, Sutherland IV27 4NN. Tel 01571 833241 email PandIEVANS@aol.com**

It is sad how little information a visitor can normally discover about local biodiversity, once arrived in Scotland and probably without any access to the internet. These three publications are therefore greatly to be welcomed. The RSPB Highland group has produced an excellent booklet listing 52 bird-watching sites in the region: actually, it is considerably more, for there are often several locations listed under one heading. We found it very useful, claiming enough but not too much – there is always a tendency for site guides to be over-optimistic about what the visitor will

encounter. Similarly the Borders branch of the SOC has produced an excellent list of 79 sites for birdwatchers to visit in that area. Both contain sensible advice about access, both for vehicles and pedestrians. The SOC booklet is the more stylishly produced, and is also free, no doubt because of an efficient trawl of funding bodies.

Importantly, both these guides list what sites are there, irrespective of who owns or manages them. We have seen leaflets from SWT on wildlife in Fife and the Lothians, displayed with commendable initiative in the ‘Superfast’ ferry terminal at Zeebrugge, but sadly spoiled because they only refer to SWT reserves: a visitor to East Fife would have had a poor time missing out Tentsmuir, the Eden estuary and the Isle of May, none of which are in SWT ownership. The boat from Zeebrugge to Rosyth sails past some of the most spectacular wildlife sites in Scotland, including the Bass Rock, seething with Gannets like an Attenborough spectacular, but neither Visit Scotland, SNH nor the ferry company have thought fit to provide any information whatsoever.

The Wildlife of Scourie is a different kind of publication, devoted to one beautiful and interesting place, with an appetizing account of a year’s community wildlife events, a description of the habitats, and more detailed listing of wildlife. In this case it is not only birds, but also an indication of what can be seen in most of the other groups, mammals, insects, reptiles and so on, as well as a list of the over 270 ferns and flowering plants, and something on groups like bryophytes, fungi and lichens. It is great. Any group with enthusiasts and initiative could imitate it and produce their own local biodiversity guide and – critically – make it available in local bookshops and tourist information centres. Why don’t we all do it?

Chris Smout

DATES FOR THE DIARY

29 October 2006 – Dumfries and Galloway 2nd Annual Wildlife Recording Conference. Dumfries. See website at www.dgerc.org.uk for details. To attend contact Rachel Johnson, Tel 01387 247 543 or email rjohnson@dgerc.org.uk

3 November 2006 – Take A Pride In Fife Environmental day – Rothes Halls, Glenrothes, Fife. Booking by 13 Oct. at www.fifedirect.org.uk/environment

9 November 2006 – “Who will watch the small things that run the world?” Invertebrate link (JCCBI) Conference 2006, The Natural History Museum (Flett Theatre), London. Attendance is free, but please book well in advance. Contact Oliver Cheesman at oliver@dipsacus.org

17 November 2006 - "Who has been using our records?: making use of data through the NBN" The National Biodiversity Network Annual Conference, The Natural History Museum (Flett Theatre), London. Programme and booking form available for downloading at www.nbn.org.uk or from Trevor James, Tel 01487-772410. Attendance fee for other than representatives of voluntary societies: £15, including buffet refreshments, etc.