

NSA VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2019**TALKS & EVENTS****GATEHOUSE TALKS & EXCURSIONS PROGRAMME**

All talks start at 19.30 in the Mill on the Fleet. Cost £2, under 16s free. Excursions free but booking essential from first day of month in which held. Enquiries to gatehouseteg@gmail.com or telephone 01557 814824.

Friday 28 June 19.30 Eco Gardening at the Cally Gardens by Kevin Hughes

Saturday 29 June Excursion to Cally Gardens

Friday 26 July 19.30 Gatehouse; Industrial Town by Professor Ian Donnachie, with a showing of the Open University film taken in Gatehouse in the 1970s.

Friday 30 August 19.30 The Faeds of Gatehouse illustrated talk by Dr David Steel.

EVENTS AT RSPB MERSEHEAD

Thursday 13 & 27 June, 11 & 25 July, and 8 & 22 August 11.00-13.00 - Summer Discovery Walk

Discover some of the amazing wildlife looked after on our farm. As the season changes, so too do the habitats and special creatures found here - from birdsong to buzzing insects and flowers turning to seed. These walks give you a chance to see it all close-up and learn how we manage this important place for nature in our fields and on the wetlands.

Booking essential. Price: £4 Adults, £2 Children (£3 & £1.50 for RSPB members).

Contact mersehead@rspb.org.uk

Tuesday 25 June & 27 August 09.30-13.00 - Mersehead Beach Clean

We need your help to clean up our shores! Plastic pollution is drastic for our marine life and seabirds. We are removing the washed-up waste on our 3.2 mile shoreline, and welcome you to join our Tuesday Volunteers on this clean up. Please bring your own GLOVES, waterproofs, sturdy footwear and a packed lunch (if staying for the day). Meet at the farm car park (along road from the visitor centre). There are no car parking charges for taking part on this event. Price: FREE.

Friday 12 & 26 July, Friday 30 August 20.00- 23.30 - Badger Banquet

Feast your eyes on badgers as they snuffle around for a snack in the garden. These creatures are living on the reserve and often leave tracks and signs along our trails but close views can be a challenge. Watch them from the comfort of our Sulwath Centre, with hot drinks also available for the evening. Booking essential. Adults £12, Children £6 (£10 and £5 for RSPB Members).

Friday 9 August, Saturday 17 & 24 August 21.30-23.30 – On the Night Watch

Some things do go bump in the night! But they may also screech, flutter or snuffle around too. Join us for a nocturnal celebration of Mersehead's night life. We'll go on a short walk with special night vision cameras and bat detectors, as well as checking for moths in our trap. We're in for a wild night indeed! Booking essential. Price: £12 adults, £6 children, (£8 and £4 for RSPB members)

TRAINING

Saturday 13 July SWSEIC Dragonfly ID Day, Ringford



South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre will be holding a dragonfly ID day, as part of National Dragonfly Week, which will include a short indoor session in the morning followed by a visit to the ponds at Barstobrick Visitor Centre in the afternoon. The event links in with a dragonfly open day being held at Barstobrick by the Scottish Wildlife Trust Galloway Group on the same day which will be open to anyone to attend. Weather permitting, there should be an opportunity to see several common species at close range and learn key identification features in the field. The day is suitable for beginners and improvers – no previous knowledge or experience is necessary. Cost £5 to include morning tea/biscuits and a copy of SWSEIC's dragonfly booklet. Places are limited and booking essential. Contact SWSEIC at info@swseic.org.uk



National Plant Monitoring Scheme

NPMS training days in June

Wednesday 26 June Cairnmore of Fleet

Tuesday 11th June at New Cumnock, East Ayrshire

Want to brush up on your plant ID and help with a national monitoring scheme for our wild flowers? Places are still available for the free National Plant Monitoring Scheme training days. Both events are being led by SWSEIC project officer Peter Norman. For more details, and to book a place, visit the training and events page of the NPMS website. You will need to register on the NPMS site before booking your place. If you are interested please register and book as soon as possible so we can plan appropriately for the events.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Fleet Valley

Wednesdays - Meet 10am. Please contact Ron Forster (tel. 07711 362645) who will advise of meeting locations and tasks arranged.

TRAINING COURSE FOR FORESTRY APPRENTICES

Seven Forest and Land Scotland apprentices took part in a five-day wall building course in Cally woods in April. The course which was part of the Erasmus+ project, “Yesterday’s knowledge, tomorrow’s know-how”, involved both an introduction to the theory of, and practical instruction in, different aspects of wall building. The apprentices are working towards a national qualification in Forestry. During the training, their supervisor from the Barony Agricultural College visited the site and evaluated the students’ work. He was very positive about the course and the students’ efforts.

On the first day the trainees were given a thorough introduction to the health and safety aspects of dry stone wall building and used diagrams to understand the theory of wall construction. They then rebuilt a first section of dyke. On the second day they cleared fallen trees from an area around a section of wall and also some young trees growing near the structure as well as re-building more walls. On the third day the group searched for stone around a section of wall which had collapsed completely and on the fourth day they learnt other techniques such as building cheek ends and walls around a tree. The final day was given over to an evaluation of the work done and a visit to other types of wall to study how they could use the experience gained.

Kevin, the trainer was very pleased with the level of skill acquired by the trainees, their ability to work as a team and their general motivation. He split the trainees into two groups who developed good team working skills and were also quite competitive. In the later stages of the course he brought the two teams together and they worked well as a single team.



Apprentices clearing stone to re-build a wall

David Steel

SPRINGTIME AT MERSEHEAD

Spring has arrived at RSPB Mersehead reserve as the Barnacle Geese have now left the area to make their way back to Svalbard 2000 miles away, and each week there is a new arrival for the Summer. Lapwing are breeding all over the reserve and the nest eggs we identified earlier in the month have begun to hatch. It's great to spot tiny chicks scurrying around the fields. Other arrivals to Mersehead include White Wagtail, Wheatear, Black-tailed Godwit and Spotted Flycatcher. Arriving towards the end of May, Spotted Flycatcher are a relatively late Spring arrival as they depend on flying insects as a food source. Also eating flying insects are Sand Martins, House Martins and Swallows, which have all made an appearance at the reserve.



Mersehead is also a great place to see Brown Hare and Roe Deer. Several Brown Hare Leverets and Roe Deer Fawn have been spotted around the reserve. The Natterjack Toads seem to be having a delayed breeding season this year. The population has been growing each year and so it is natural to have a slight dip in numbers. However, Natterjack toads can have an extended breeding season right up until late July and so we may see more activity and possibly an increase on the 33 spawn strings counted this spring.

*Lapwing chick on Mersehead main track.
Photo E. Neilson*

A Grey Scalloped Bar moth appeared in our warden's garden moth trap. This moth is very rare to the area with the last recorded in Kirkcudbrightshire in 1988. The last record in Dumfries and Galloway as a whole, was in 2003. It was a surprise to see the species at Mersehead as they tend to appear in areas of heathland, moorland, raised mosses and bogs.

Fields have been ploughed in preparation for wild bird covers - as farming practices change, there has been a decline in farmland birds. Ploughing the field brings earthworms to the surface for birds to feed on and by sowing mixed seed crops, we are creating attractive feeding habitats for farmland birds such as Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow. With the Spring comes early morning surveying. Some mornings, we have been out at dawn to survey the waders and wildfowl across the site: Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank, Oystercatcher are all found at Mersehead. Also present are Shelduck, Teal, Shoveler, and Mallard.

Another part of habitat management is controlling the Japanese Rose. This invasive, non-native species has taken over the hedgerow and outcompetes native species. To control the spread of Japanese rose, we removed plants over the winter, and now are removing new shoots. The aim is to allow native species to flourish.

Cheye Pollard
Residential Volunteer

FIELD MEETING AT MABIE FOREST, NEW ABBEY 1 JUNE 2019

The field meetings of the Kirkcudbrightshire Botany Group just get better and better this year with rare or scarce plants recorded - even the weather was better behaved than that forecast...



Mabie Forest, although owned and managed by the Forest and Land Scotland, is about 50% mature deciduous woodland with a variety of habitats besides woodland – including a loch, several ponds, marshy areas, grassland, forest rides and glades, all over soils varying from acidic to virtually neutral, dry to damp/wet. Several ancient woodland indicator species were recorded in the first half hour or so, with dog's mercury, common enchanter's nightshade, wood speedwell, yellow pimpernel, wood melic, a variety of sedges, sweet woodruff, beech fern and hard shield fern.

The Group Photo: Fiona Macfarlane



Beech fern Phegopteris connectilis
Photo: David Hawker



Hard shield fern Polystichum aculeatum
Photo: Iain Gormly

Quite apart from other species not exclusively associated with woodland – bluebell, some still in flower, wood anemone, greater wood-rush and wood sorrel. Even the odd primrose was still in flower. We recorded both avens, wood *Geum urbanum* with its small upright yellow flowers, and water *G. rivale* with purplish large nodding flowers, and finally the hybrid *G. x intermedium* of large yellow drooping flowers.



There was a wide variety of trees, both deciduous and coniferous, and shrubs (several obviously planted) including hybrid whitebeam *Sorbus x thuringiaca*,

Both the loch and pools contained pondweeds, either bog pondweed or broad-leaved pondweed, amongst the duckweed, water horsetail with its hollow stem, and white water lily. Unfortunately in one of the man-made pools we came across curly pondweed *Lagarosiphon majus* which is an invasive water weed, while around the edge there was garden *Hemerocallis* and purple-flowered garden *Iris*.

Hybrid avens Geum x intermedium Photo: David Hawker

But the highlight of the day was undoubtedly the re-finding of the previously reported, by Peter Robinson two weeks earlier, bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, the last and only record being in 1848 from close by.

What a day! The tally was 173 species in two monads of one tetrad and 92 in a monad of an adjoining tetrad, making a total of 198 species during the day. If I tried to list or describe all we'd seen, then this missive would have formed a small booklet.

Bird's nest orchid Neottia nidus-avis
Photo: Fiona Macfarlane



David Hawker
Kirkcudbrightshire Botany Group

MAINTAINING PUBLIC SPACES IN GATEHOUSE

As the Local Authority continues to withdraw from providing non-statutory services pressure is growing on communities to help maintain local amenities. This is particularly important for a community such as Gatehouse, which needs to look attractive to the visitors on whom we are dependent.

In 2017 the Fleet Valley volunteers took over the upkeep of the Town Hall garden. With support from Action Earth and donations both of plants and cash to buy plants, the gardens have been fully restored to their former beauty. However, although the amount of work required is not too great, the gardens do need continuous upkeep. Thanks to the volunteers the gardens have been thoroughly weeded once again, shrubs have been cut back and bedding plants put in. The rose beds will soon be in full bloom.



Another important public space is the Mill on the Fleet. The Local Authority will continue to cut the grass but here, too, the volunteers have been hard at work clearing ivy and growth near the new men’s shed. Last year we weeded part of the bank leading down to the Mill and planted a number of shrubs and flowers which had been donated. More plants have been put in this year and the approach to the Mill is now much enhanced.

David Steel

SEEING THE TREES

From the headwaters of the river Fleet to Port Macadam, in Garries Wood and Stelage Wood, in Campbell’s field, below the town car park and Cally Woods, the National Scenic Area volunteers have been busy planting trees over the years.

Trees have been planted in memory of loved ones. People have donated trees. The cost of trees has been paid for by sums raised to offset the carbon used by people participating in a conference.



Deciduous trees have been planted to combat the acidification of the headwaters of the Fleet. In Cally Woods, fruiting trees have been planted to encourage wildlife. Apple and other fruit trees have been planted in Garries Wood and Garries Park for the benefit of the community. In Stelage Wood trees have been planted to replace ancient trees which had died or fallen in storms.

We have also removed trees where necessary. In Garries Wood there has been some thinning to allow trees to mature. In Carstramon Wood we have helped to remove beech saplings which can crowd out native species and, on the banks of the Little Water of Fleet, we have removed regenerating spruce in order to replace them with deciduous species. In Beech Wood and at Cally Gardens we have removed large areas of *Rhododendron ponticum*, which should allow other species to thrive, and help prevent the spread of *phytophthora ramorum* which can infect and kill larch trees.

Tree planting has been a learning process. We were encouraged to surround trees in Stelage Wood with whins but these were no match for the cattle, so they had to be protected with fencing. In Cally Woods our efforts were threatened by deer but increasing the use of tree guards solved the problem. Trees in Garries Park have been slow to grow but they are now coming on well and on the Little Water of Fleet we found that not all areas were suitable for planting. Over all the tree planting has been successful, helping to protect and enhance the local environment.

David Steel

ANNA



You will remember from our last edition that Anna Johnson wrote about major cuts to the Environment Team and, sadly, the post of National Scenic Area Officer has now ended. There will no longer be direct specialist support to NSA communities. One of the results is that this, our 54th newsletter, will be the last NSA Countryside Team News – at least in its present form. It is impossible for me to overestimate the hard work and enthusiasm that Anna has brought to the job over the years and the NSA will be very much the poorer without her guidance. We wish her every success in her new role.

Alison Steel