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TENTSMUIR NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER No. 32

JANUARY 2015

Happy New Year to you all, I hope you have a great 2015 and I look forward to seeing you out on the Reserve at some point.

Hello and welcome to the winter edition of the Reserve Newsletter. I hope you all enjoyed the festive break; it's been a real mix bag of weather which has literally been thrown at us especially the prolonged spell of gales and strong winds. Still these sunny cold spells are just the perfect days to get outside and visit the Reserve sites.

This will be a brilliant Newsletter to read through with a lot of good articles kindly or coerced by me, maybe blackmailed, no they all kindly provided very interesting articles for you to read about what going on around and in the Reserve.

You all know by now the amazing dynamic coast line, the forever changing shapes, sculpted by the sea, storms, wind and rain, are its continually changing as you read this.

The image below was kindly provided by one of the RSPB volunteers who watched over the white-tailed sea eagles nest. When you spy one of these birds it leaves you with that "wow" speechless moments. Read more about these magnificent birds inside.

My grateful thanks to all the contributors in this edition, so with no further ado read on and find out what's going on.



White-tailed sea eagle adult & this year's chick. Image by kind permission from Raymond Leinster.

Tom Cunningham
Reserve Manager

TENTSMUIR NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

THE YEAR of FOOD & DRINK 2015

The Year of Food and Drink is a Scottish Government initiative led by EventScotland and VisitScotland that will capitalise on the momentum created by the previous Year of Food and Drink in 2010, Year of Natural Scotland 2013 and Homecoming Scotland 2014. We will of course be putting our own spin on this on our summer events.

THE RESERVE PLANS 2014 TO 2024

The Reserve Plan 2014-2014 was finally completed and you can read all about the management of the Reserve on our NNR website:

www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/tentsmuir/management/reserve-planning/

TENTSMUIR POINT

THE DYNAMIC COASTLINE

Stormy wild days over last autumn and during this winter have continued to shape the dunes. The northern dune edge had some of its highest dunes totally swept away, leaving an astonishingly flat sandy landscape. Years and years of dune accretion has been plucked away over a few days. Thankfully to the south, the dune edge continues to creep seaward.

Fortunately at Tentsmuir Point we haven't had too much flotsam/rubbish washing up on the foreshore, whereas at St Cyrus NNR, some thirty odd miles north of Tentsmuir, the Reserve Manager, Therese, had rubbish piled high along the high water line.

MANAGEMENT

The Limousine cattle grazed throughout the Reserve last year, roaming from one end to the other. Occasionally you could see them sun bathing on the foreshore and more often than not standing in the sea in an effort to escape the flies. They went back to Scotsraig Farm in October very clean and will probably return sometime in May.

The Cleek Burn ditch was carefully cleaned out by a contractor recently and this should help the forest drainage system, which will benefit the Great Slack by winter flooding. The cattle like to drink in the burn however they poach the ditch up. (Poaching can be a problem when cattle move around gateways, feeding areas and watering points leading to risks of soil erosion and compaction.) After the winter storms, it will be time for the sea salmon netsmen Bob Ritchie and Mikey Smith from Kinnaber to come down and carry out the annual maintenance on the sea fences. So far, fingers crossed there hasn't been too much damage on the sea fences.

EDUCATIONAL VISITS

We have been very busy again this last year with 23 visits to the Reserve sites: Nurseries 0, Primary Schools 1, High Schools 15, and Colleges 3 & Universities 4. Well over 600 students attending.

Feedback from the students and teachers is always positive; they find the sites enormously rewarding and valuable for their field trips.

POETS & POETRY

Dr Jim Stewart from the University of Dundee, our Poet in Residence in 2013, has produced several poems and I will include them in the next Newsletter edition. They will be worth the wait.

Thanks to poet Penny Hemans, who used to live close by, for sending me her poem; the poem sums up winter really well.

SNOW-COLD IN TENTSMUIR

snow-cold fingers
wrapped in grey folds of gabardine

long-johns dripping
sliding into booted ankles

mink-furred capulet
covering pink-chilled ears

I cycle home
through the hibernating forest

free-wheeling
over stony ground and slush-mushed ridges

while sleepy eyes peep out from cavernous quercus roots
clamouring, cajoling, restless

'Spring will soon return' I call to them
as I trundle by –

Winter in Tentsmuir
 where the Tay
 shakes hands
 with the glassy sea

WILDLIFE UPDATE

RSPB East Scotland Sea Eagle Officer Rhian Evans kindly provided the following article and some stunning images.

For the fourth year in a row, a pair of White-tailed Sea Eagles released from the East of Scotland in 2009 have been frequenting the shore line, dunes and forest of Tentsmuir. The pair who bred successfully for the first time last year in Fife, raising the first chick to fledge from the wild in the East of Scotland for over 200 years had another successful breeding attempt again this year. Albeit in a different nest! The new location of the nest enabled RSPB and Forestry Commission staff to discreetly install a hide for volunteers to keep watch over the nest throughout the season to protect it from potential disturbance. 25 RSPB volunteers were involved along with 10 staff from both organisations in what was described as a very rewarding experience. Thankfully the season passed without concern, and the pair once again fledged a single healthy male chick. The young eagle was fitted with white wing tags with the letter "A" to allow easy identification in the field by members of the public. His parents have turquoise wing tags with number "1" and letter "Z". The youngster fledged on the 15th of August and has been seen learning to hunt with his parents. He was also fitted with a satellite transmitter so that his every move will be followed closely by RSPB staff. Although the adult pair are seen frequently hunting on the Eden Estuary and sometimes at Tentsmuir point, the youngster has yet to make the journey to the open beach to join them.



White tailed sea eagle. Image by kind permission from Iona LeCorre

The presence of the adult birds hunting at Tentsmuir has given people a lot of pleasure since they first arrived, with sightings and photographs being submitted by members of the public to the RSPB. With grant money received from Heritage Lottery Fund, the RSPB were able to put more resources into helping people enjoy the eagles at Tentsmuir this year with help from Forestry Commission and SNH staff.

Sophie Eastwood was taken on as Community Information Officer for the RSPB, and attended a number of events during the summer held at Tentsmuir as well as throughout Tayside and Fife. Sophie shared exclusive footage with the public that had been gathered from the East of Scotland reintroduction project since it started seven years ago. She also carried out a series of four guided walks along the dunes at Tentsmuir where the adult White-tailed Eagles have been known to hunt and perch. The parties attending the walks were treated to some great views of the birds on three out of four walks, and also enjoyed the other wonderful wildlife on the beach and in the forest on the way. These included Grey and Common Seals, Red Squirrels and even the elusive Green Woodpeckers! Some of the walks finished with a coffee to warm up at Tayport Harbour Café where walkers could enjoy watching even more footage of White-tailed Eagles in the wild and learn more about the project.



Eagle eyes hoping to view the white-tailed sea eagle. Image by kind permission from Rhian Evans

Keep your eyes peeled if you're taking a walk along the beach this winter for hunting White-tailed Eagles. All sightings of the birds are gratefully received by emailing eastscotlandsea eagles@rspb.org.uk

The outstanding bird of winter once again has to be the snow bunting with wildlife artist Derek Robertson studying these beautiful mountain birds. They have also been observed recently by other visitors. Ahemmmm! I have also been successful observing the sea eagles. We hope the white tailed sea eagles will enjoy another great year and fingers crossed the osprey pair return.

MORTON LOCHS

MANAGEMENT

The largest management contract at Morton Lochs was carried out recently and its one that I had been desperately wanting for some time.

West Loch sluice replacement project at Morton Lochs.

For some years now, the old spillway which was constructed in 1976, was leaking on the left bank, the right bank of the ditch and underneath. The water flow had eventually eroded the sides of the ditch working its way around the concrete sides and eroded away the sandy sediments underneath the large concrete base. The base had eventually collapsed several years ago. We carried out a few repairs to the old spillway over the years however, water always found its way through the repairs and washed away the sandy soil structures. We even built small dams downstream from the spillway, which took me back to my childhood days of damming little burns and these dams did keep the water levels at the level we desire.



The vibrating head on a JCB caterpillar tracked machine in action with a 4 metre long 6mm thick steel pile being vibrated into place.

Bearing in mind the sea covered the Morton Lochs area some 5000 year ago, it is no surprise that the sandy sediments are easily washed away particularly in the inflow and outflow ditches. We needed a sluice system that was robust and large enough to remain in place for many years to come.

Noticing that Flanders Moss NNR had recently installed several new robust sluices I asked the advice of colleagues Francois Chazel and Iain Jamieson on their new design plans for the sluices. I more-or-less copied the designs, however, substituting steel instead of plastic piling for the new sluice for the west loch outflow.

The work was undertaken by Arbuckle's of Falkirk, led by Scott Dalglish who took the design we wanted and built the steel frame into the steel piling sheets. Using a very large machine with a vibrating head, Scott drove in the 4 metre long steel piles and connected the drop frame in place. Scott and his colleague worked on the contract for four days, first building a coffer dam which gave them space to pile drive the steel piles on either side of the outflow banks, through the ditch and then they bolted on the steel frame that would take the oak dropboards. We managed to get oak boards from a wood in Fife, using wind damaged trees (a sustainable source) and after getting them profiled to the shape we required, we installed them this month.



The completed sluice with oak dropboards in place

VIEW from the SQUIRREL HIDE

The squirrel hide and the feeders have been very popular especially with visitors who haven't been close or even observed a red squirrel; to say that some visitors have been thrilled is an understatement!

We have been fortunate that student Ellie Tonks has started some research into the activities of the red squirrel and Ellie kindly provided this article and a couple of images from her field cameras. Fortunately for me Ellie hasn't shown us the photos of the back of my head as I top up the squirrel feeders every morning!

'As part of my final year research project for my biology degree at the University of St Andrews, I am fortunate enough to be working with the beautifully mischievous Red Squirrels at Morton Lochs.

The squirrel hide at Morton Lochs was built following the end of the three-year Fife Red Squirrel Project in April 2014. In front of the hide there are now two squirrel feeders so the hide gives visitors the opportunity to observe squirrels feeding from only a few metres away. For the project, I am carrying out a red squirrel activity study using camera traps, monitoring changes in squirrel activity over the seasons. We have been photographing the squirrels

since June, with a camera set facing the squirrel feeders by the new squirrel hide. The camera is motion sensitive, so is triggered by the animals' movement on the feeders.



Two red squirrels on the feeder. Image by Ellie Tonks

When analysing the photos, I initially have to flick through all of the squirrel images on the camera memory card. In doing so, I often come across a few surprises, such as the resident great spotted woodpecker, the occasional deer, a foraging badger on the forest floor, or even a magnificently coloured pheasant. In addition to the other species modelling for my camera shots, another fun aspect of the study has been that I have started to recognise particular individual red squirrels (such as White Tail, named after a characteristic white tail).

In the new year, I plan on continuing to monitor the squirrels with the camera for my feeding activity study; but, in addition, I will also look at the effect of human disturbance, such as wildlife viewing, on the squirrels. This study will analyse the effectiveness of the new squirrel hide down at Morton Lochs — a question of great importance to the hide here at Morton Lochs and also for future squirrel hides across Scotland. For any further information on the study, or if you feel you have any information that could prove useful (even your own interesting sightings of the squirrels) please feel free to get in touch.'



Great spotted woodpecker a free feed. Image by Ellie Tonks

If you do have any information that Ellie could use, you can email me and I will pass the information onto Ellie.

WILDLIFE UPDATE

Along with otters, badgers and the usual birds on the loch, a new species for Morton Lochs, the Little Egret, was observed on two occasions by Jacqui Herrington and also Rob Ford. If you hang by the squirrel hide you can also see long tailed tits, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, chaffinches, wrens, robins as well as lovely fat pheasants and partridge, even the badgers snuffling under the feeders - they all benefit from the squirrel food.

Morton Lochs is a "Hot Spot" for dragonflies and damselflies, so keep an eye open and let us know what you observe please. It will not be long when the earliest emerging damselflies can be seen around mid-April. Daniele Muir the Scottish Officer for the British Dragonfly Society is very keen to hear from anyone with sightings from around the Morton Lochs footpaths and open sunny areas. Email me please if you have some observations.

WILDLIFE ARTIST - DEREK ROBERTSON BA RSW SSA SAA

Do Artists in Residence ever stop? Well, the easy answer to that is Probably Not! And it would be wonderful if Derek never does! As most of you know, the brilliant wildlife and awarding winning artist Derek Robertson was appointed in 2013 to be the Tentsmuir NNR Artist in Residence, and has never stopped painting, sketching, teaching, talking and exhibiting ever since! In fact, Derek seems to be as busy as ever.

An eight week exhibition opened in the Lamb Gallery at the University of Dundee on Friday 17 October and celebrated the work of not only Derek, but the collaborative efforts of all the scientists and artists who enjoyed the year on Tentsmuir NNR. The exhibition ran until December 13th Derek began a series of innovative projects to explore and celebrate the reserve and its wildlife, bringing together scientists and creative practitioners who used the Reserve as a resource for inspiration, research and teaching. These collaborations resulted in a range of projects and artwork from poetry to paintings; photography to storytelling, and displays some of their work as well as giving some background to the collaborations which developed. Derek talked about his year and the honour of being the Artist in Residence and the great pride it had given him and the work he carried out. I then gave my introduction to the event and summed it up by saying it was definitely one the best things I had managed to bring to the Reserve. Dr Jim Stewart then recited one his poems, about the red squirrel that managed to bite him and this inspired one of Derek's paintings. Derek's work didn't stop there, as he had further talks and exhibitions planned for 2014 which included: The: 'Between Tides:' in the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh. Tentsmuir is a unique area of North East Fife caught between the tides of the Tay and the Forth, and is endowed with a rich ecology. Derek, and storytellers Lea Taylor and Mhairi Campbell, combined with SNH to capture the flow of nature and the spirit of a special place.

Other exhibitions included: 'Some Lines on a Landscape.' This was a workshop in the Lamb Gallery when Derek and Jim Stewart give an insight into their science/art project at Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve.

Derek also continued providing talks for the Perthshire Society of Natural Science in the Perth Museum & Art Gallery and an excellent talk for the Dundee Naturalists' Society, in the Tower Building University of Dundee.

So you can see Derek was busy well beyond 2013 and almost to the end of 2014, and Derek just keeps going and (hopefully) going on and on.....

Volunteers

Our wonderful band of dedicated volunteers carry out an amazing amount of work throughout the Reserve and much of it is unseen. For example the brilliant butterfly monitoring on the three transects, unless you have a look online at the Butterfly Conservation website where our Reserve data is stored you, probably would be unaware of this monitoring. My grateful thanks go to Daphne, Gillian, Ruth, Anne-Marie, Elspeth and Gerry for carrying out this work every year for the past eight years now. The bird monitoring is carried out in much the same way and my grateful thanks goes out to Paul & Craig.

We welcome new volunteers Blair Johnston and Tom Ross. Blair comes in every week as part of his student placement from Elmwood College and works alongside long term volunteer Jim Rougvie. Tom has just recently started the bird monitoring on Tentsmuir Point taking over from Craig Ferries who leaves to start a new job on the island of Lewis.

Elmwood College students Willie Doing & Ali Campbell both worked hard on the Reserve during their final year and both started new jobs at the end of last summer. We send our good wishes to all three, but before they left I twisted their arms for a short article from Willie & Ali.

Ali Campbell provided the following article:

'I have had a lifelong interest in the natural heritage and have, since September 2012 been undertaking an NC and HNC in Countryside Management with a view to making this my future vocation. The more I learn and the more I build my experience through volunteering the stronger the desire to achieve my ambition grows.

Why Tentsmuir? I have been volunteering at Tentsmuir Forrest one day a week for the last year now. The reason I decided Tentsmuir would be a good place to start volunteering was the work they were offering and experiences they could provide me. This has involved a wide range of tasks such as habitat management, talking with the public, day to day routine maintenance and dealing with other management issues as they arose. Throughout my year here I have had the chance to gain knowledge from two people that have had a long running success of the site, Tom Cunningham and Alex Eason who are both very knowledgeable and easy to get along with. This made my days there very enjoyable and extremely rewarding.

Onwards and upwards, since being at Tentsmuir one day a week and at college completing my HNC this past year, I had put in for a position with the forestry commission Scotland, modern apprentice for the Galloway area, this was a long process, and finally I was through to the final stage. With a lot of advice and mentoring from Alex and Tom reassuring me that I am capable of this position "confidence boost" final stage here I come.

Coming to an end, I have had word back from my final stage interview offering me the position at Galloway. I have since accepted this and informed Alex and Tom that my Volunteering would come to an end in August of this year, I will be sad to leave my volunteering days at Tentsmuir, and of course the staff Alex, Tom, Graham, and John who have all made me feel part of the team and welcome. '

Willie Doig provided this article: Tentsmuir: A volunteer's story!!!!

'As a student at Elmwood College SRUC we were encouraged to participate in as many volunteering opportunities as became available and at the time Tentsmuir NNR was new to me until we were taken there on our first field trip. It was apparent that the reserve required its own style of management and it became clear to me that this would benefit me as a ranger in the future. After contacting Reserve Manager Tom Cunningham expressing my wish to become a volunteer I was given the all clear to come and help out as part of the volunteer team. It did not take long to realise that a unique style of management was required with the cooperation between SNH and the Forestry Commission, providing me with an insight into a setup rarely found within other projects.

My time at Tentsmuir consisted of many different tasks from menial tasks such as tidying up to helping out and organising tasks for open days which we then attended and carried out as requested by the management team. Interactions with both of the management team firstly Tom and the Forestry Commissions counterpart Alec Eason provided me with valuable insight and skills I will use further in my career and to them I am eternally grateful for their willingness to pass on their knowledge and expertise in the running of a project such as this.

As part of the team, the great focus was on visitor management i.e., safety of visitors and education, and this was partnered with an assortment of practical tasks vital to the project as well as giving me the skills I need to further my career within the conservation industry. I would strongly advise anyone in my situation studying towards a career in this industry to consider Tentsmuir NNR as a volunteering opportunity as it has been a vital part of my learning and has given me skills and the confidence to apply myself to any project in the future.

I would just like to convey thanks to both Tom Cunningham and Alec Eason for the time they have given me and will forever be grateful to them.'

Thank you to Willie & Ali for the articles and we all wish you great success in your new careers.

WHAT'S ON

Last year we held four Open Days, including the 15th annual Family Day on the Reserve and three jointly held by Forestry Commission. We also had the RSPB White Tailed Sea Eagle officer Sophie Eastwood and Fife Nature's Alexa Tweddle assisting on the events. Over 1000 visitors enjoyed themselves.

I managed to get the wonderful Alexa to provide this article. Alexa has a brilliant way with children, calm, patient and imparts her amazing knowledge with ease.

'Throughout the summer months I attend a variety of events to raise awareness about the work of Fife Nature Records Centre and the importance of biological recording. Of the 13 or so events I attended in 2014, the ones I enjoyed the most were those which took place at Tentsmuir NNR!

The first event, 'Tentsmuir NNR Family Day', celebrated the 60th anniversary of Tentsmuir becoming a National Nature Reserve and was a great success! I attended with the ever popular 'poo game' where participants have to match the (fake) poo to the animals with the help of clues. For some reason, children (and some adults) just seem to love it! There were so many activities on offer and everyone had a whale of a time, visitors, staff and volunteers alike. And the birthday cake was quite something to behold!

The second event was the 'Tentsmuir NNR Explorer Day' and for this, I prepared a 'scavenger hunt' with a list of items which participants had to return with before being issued with their prize! The items ranged from 'something prickly' to 'a feather' to 'something very, very small'. The idea was to encourage participants looking at the natural world in a different way and to really explore what Tentsmuir has to offer. Quite a number of intrepid explorers took up the challenge and returned triumphant.

The third event was the 'Tentsmuir NNR Habitat Day & the Big5' and I decided that a minibeast hunt was the order of the day! On the morning of the event I scouted about for a range of minibeasts which can readily be found at Tentsmuir and soon I had a tank full of Cinnabar Moth caterpillars which can be found feasting on the Ragwort during the summer. I also found quite a number of Shieldbugs amongst the Ragwort too. The display made for quite an attraction and soon there were children swarming around desperate to take a closer look.

A number of children were keen to undertake some minibeast hunting themselves so I armed them with sweep nets and bug pots and off they went. In the end I had amassed quite a

collection of minibeasts with everything from caterpillars to spiders to snails to shieldbugs. One participant found a caterpillar-like creature which we were unable to identify so it was carefully photographed and returned to the wild (along with its fellow tank mates). I sent the photographs off to a local expert who confirmed that the creature was in fact the larva of a Sawfly, something I had not come across before.



Alexa working on one of the activities during the summer event.

The final event was the 'Tentsmuir NNR Homecoming Scotland' event and I decided I would bring a range of children's activities including nature wordsearches, quizzes and of course, the 'poo game' to keep the customers entertained!

Overall, the Tentsmuir NNR events are well-organised and well attended, drawing in crowds of people from the local area as well as visitors from further afield. And the sun always seems to be shining!

Summer Events with SNH & the Forestry Commission Scotland 2015

Some events to look forward to this year. Summer events will start with the SNH Family Day on Tentsmuir Point, followed by three joint events and these will be held at Kinshaldy car park.

Alex, along with some of our wonderful volunteers, some of our wonderful colleagues and I will hold three events in the picnic area at Kinshaldy car park. No booking is required, just turn up and join in the fun. Starts 12:30 and finishes 3:30pm.

Dates for your diaries and calendars

Thursday, 9 July 2015 is the Tentsmuir NNR Family Day (booking essential starting in June 2015 ONLY)

Thursday, 31 July 2015 between 12:30 & 3pm

Thursday, 6 August 2015 between 12:30 & 3pm

Thursday, 13 August 2015 between 12:30 & 3pm

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

To keep up to date on our Facebook page  "Scotland's National Nature Reserves". All you need to do is "Like" the page to follow us.

Tom Cunningham.
Reserve Manager
Fetterdale Office
Tentsmuir Forest
By Tayport.
DD6 9PF

Telephone/Answer machine. 01382-553704. Email: tom.cunningham@snh.gov.uk

PS The mighty Raith Rovers I hear you ask? Reasonably safe in the league, we should avoid relegation this season. Pure silky football I hear you ask? Pffttt NAH!