NESBReC NEWS

A newsletter for biological recorders in North East Scotland

Issue 13: August 2014

New office location for NESBReC

Hello and welcome to the latest newsletter from NESBReC. As many of you will know, NESBReC moved office in February this year from the University of Aberdeen to the Aberdeenshire Council offices at Woodhill House in Aberdeen - full contact details at the end of this piece. The move went relatively smoothly and we are able to continue to offer our usual services, such as data searches and updating the species database. The latter now has over 1,123,000 records! In order to increase our capacity to check and process all of the records that are submitted to NESBReC, we are currently advertising for a part-time Data Assistant to join our team. Details for the post are on the vacancies page of the Aberdeenshire Council website.



Can you supply any records of Brown Rat?

We are continuing to request any sightings of mammals for our Mammal Atlas project which still has another year to run until we prepare all of the information for the production of the

eventual book. All mammal species are important for this project, from the commonplace to the most elusive, all are gladly received at NESBReC. As always, our preferred format for receiving records is in a simple Excel spreadsheet but we will accept records in any format that you may use. We look forward to receiving any mammal sightings from you in the year ahead. One mammal species that is easy to recognise but of which we hold very few records is the Brown Rat – have you seen one recently?

Here is the new postal address and phone number for NESBReC:

North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)
Specialist Services Team
Infrastructure Services
Aberdeenshire Council
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB

Tel: 01224 664164
Email: nesbrec@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Website: www.nesbrec.org
We are also on Facebook

Glenn Roberts

Grampian Fungus Group activities this autumn

The Grampian Fungus Group (GFG) has organised a programme of forays to different habitats and locations this autumn to identify and record the fungi that they see. The GFG welcomes non-members on its forays and for the small joining fee of £5 members can take advantage of further benefits such as access to literature, microscopes and identification workshops. There are forays throughout the year but obviously there are more during autumn since this is when most fruiting bodies are visible. It is a good way to gain further insight into the fascinating world of fungi and one can learn identification tips from all members of the group.



Leotia lubrica, Jellybaby, photo by Glenn Roberts

For any further details on the Grampian Fungus Group please email Liz Holden at: liz@marmycology.co.uk

Upcoming Grampian Fungus Group forays and how to book a place:

Sun Aug 31st 10.30 – 3.30pm **Haughton Country Park, Alford.**
Foray Leader: Liz Holden (home 013397 41410, mobile 07786120753)
Sun Sept 7th 10.30 – 3.30pm **Kinnaber, Montrose.**
Foray Leader: Liz Holden (home 013397 41410, mobile 07786120753)
Sun Sept 14th 10.30 – 3.30pm **James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen**
Foray Leader: Andy Taylor (mobile 0759 2557673)
Sat Sept 20th 10.30 – 3.30pm **Paradise Wood, near Kemnay** (and possibly other sites nearby)
Foray Leader: Toni Watt (mobile 0777 3626981)
Sun Sept 28th 10.30 – 3.30pm **Haddo Country Park, Tarves.**
Foray Leader: Liz Holden (home 013397 41410, mobile 07786120753)
Sat Oct 4th 10.30-3.30 **Craigievar Castle (National Trust for Scotland).** Near Alford.
Foray Leader: Toni Watt (mobile 0777 3626981)
Fri Oct 10th - Sun Oct 12th Joint Scottish recording group foray in the Angus area. Further information nearer the time.
Contact: Liz Holden (home 013397 41410, mobile 07786120753)
Sat Oct 18th 10.30 – 3.30pm Joint GFG and Highland Group Foray to **Culbin Forest**, **near Forres**.
Foray Leader: Liz Holden (home 013397 41410, mobile 07786120753)

NESBReC identification training during 2014

During the summer of 2014 NESBReC again hosted a programme of biological training events designed to help people with the identification of particular species groups. These free sessions are really useful for beginners and improvers alike under the tuition of knowledgeable local experts and can give people the confidence to start recording what they encounter.

This year's training courses so far have focused on: Woodland Plants at Gight Wood; How to Record Wildlife for NESBReC at Seaton Park, Aberdeen; Grassland Plants at Potarch; Small Mammal Trapping at Aden Country Park; Heathland Plants at Bennachie; Small Mammal Trapping at Aberlour; and Fungi at Fetteresso Forest near Stonehaven.



Woodland Plants identification training at Gight Wood, photo Glenn Roberts

We have one final event remaining this year: Camera Trapping for Mammal Recording at Kincraig, near Aviemore on 27 September. Details of any finalised courses will be posted

on our website and Facebook sites as well as being emailed out to people who are on our emailing list.

Glenn Roberts

What's eating Aberdeen's ash trees?

Sawflies as a group often go unnoticed unless they reach pest proportions. The ash sawfly *Tomostethus nigritus* feeds only on ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and is better known on the Continent where 'swarms' are regularly described. The green caterpillars damage trees by chewing their way through leaves throughout June, leaving only the midribs. If numbers are exceptionally high, then the caterpillars can literally run out of food and starve. Attacks on urban trees are less well documented but there have been reports of outbreaks in Norwegian and Croatian cities since the 1990s. In the UK, the ash sawfly has a southern distribution and has only recently become noticeable as a pest, with outbreaks in Manchester in 2010 and Telford in 2014. Favourable conditions over winter (e.g. mild temperatures) may have been the trigger for these outbreaks.



Ash sawfly larvae on defoliated Ash in Aberdeen, photo by Andy Taylor

The species was first discovered in Aberdeen in 2013 but did little damage. In 2014 however, a large number of trees were affected, in particular along North Anderson Drive but also throughout the city.



Defoliated Ash in Aberdeen, photo by Andy Taylor

Populations of the sawfly would be expected to subside naturally within one or two seasons and there should not be any long-term effect on the health of the ash trees. The caterpillars rarely, if ever, cause tree mortality. The appearance of the species so far north is intriguing. However, a similar species in North America has also been expanding its range northwards.

Jenni Stockan & Andy Taylor
James Hutton Institute
Aberdeen

British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Many people know that Scotland is still very rich in wildlife and plants across our natural lands, but fewer people are aware of the incredible diversity off the coast. There are 24 species of whale and dolphin (cetaceans) and 2 species of seal (pinnipeds) regarded as resident in UK waters with numerous other species sighted as migrant or rare visitors, and the Moray Firth and East Grampian coastline are among the best places to see these wonderful animals. Indeed, the Moray Firth is counted among the best places in the world for watching seals, dolphins and whales and Scotland is home to almost 30% of the world population of Grey Seals (*Halichoerus grypus*).

However this wealth of natural history can provide a problem if things go wrong for the animals. What do you do if you find a seal pup on the beach when walking the dog? Who can help when a whole pod of pilot whales (*Globicephela melas*) strands along the coast?



Grey seal pup, photo by Brett Lewis

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) is the only organisation devoted to helping marine animals in Scotland, Wales and England with teams of volunteer medics arranged throughout the country. Originally founded in East Anglia in 1988 during the Seal Distemper outbreak BDMLR has grown to be one of the internationally recognised experts in marine animal rescue and refloating, introducing the use of whale pontoons in the Northern

Hemisphere. With around 2400 volunteers around the country BDMLR is able to be called out 24 hours to assist with any marine animal emergency including abandoned seal pups, dolphin strandings and entangled whales. The organisation works closely with other animal rescue charities and most local sick or abandoned seal pups are admitted to the SSPCA animal hospital in Alloa.

How can the public help?

If members of the public come across seal pups, the most important thing is not to try and move them or shepherd them back into the sea. Grey seals particularly are not born with a waterproof coat and can't swim well for the first few weeks of life. Also any maternal bond will be lost if the mother smells humans on the pup. If there is concern about the health or welfare of pups medics can always be called out to assess animals and determine if they need help. Sometimes it is necessary simply to monitor and see if a mother does come back for the pup. Adult seals are very dangerous animals which will inflict serious injuries on the unwary so handling them untrained should be avoided, even if entangled or stuck in any way. Call the BDMLR 24hr help line and if possible take pictures which can be emailed or sent via picture messaging.

For dolphins and small whales, again if stranded or very close to the beach and at risk of stranding, call the BDMLR help line and a medic team can be scrambled to help. Please avoid pushing the animal(s) back into the sea until a vet has had the chance to assess them. Be aware that the tail of a dolphin is very strong and can be at least as dangerous as being kicked by a horse and that the blow (exhaled breath from the blowhole) can contain a lot of nasty bacteria so should be avoided.

First aid for dolphins and small whales involves keeping the animal(s) wet, avoiding the blowhole, protecting from wind and sun by building shade if possible and turning them so that they are fully upright as most dolphins end up lying on their side on the beach. Unfortunately many animals strand in the final stages of illness, but BDMLR have a higher success rate than many other organisations around the world and the sooner these first aid steps start then the higher chance of a successful refloat.



Cetacean rescue at Durness, photo BDMLR

In 2013 BDMLR founded the first Large Whale Entanglement team in Europe. Research suggests that most large baleen whales strand due to entaglements in nets, creels ropes and such like. Given the enormous weight of these animals, the chance of being able to assist once they are on a beach is very low so it is hugely important to be able to take to the sea and help remove any entanglements while they are still afloat. Again anyone who sees an entangled animal at sea can call the BDMLR help line or contact through the Coastguard and the Large Whale Disentaglement team will be able to assist.

From time to time, unfortunately we do also find dead animals washed up on the beaches, either decomposing or recently deceased. While BDMLR obviously can't do anything for these, the Scottish Marine Strandings Scheme would be interested in any details to help develop our understanding of the causes of death and populations. For dead animals only they can be contacted on 01463 243030 or stranding@sac.co.uk. The BDMLR help line for any queries is 01825 765546 and out of hours the help line is manned by volunteers on 07787 433412. For any further information or queries about BDMLR or medics in the local area please email aberdeen@bdmlr.org.uk.

Colin McFadyen, BDMLR

Asian Hornet Alert

The GB Non-Native Species Secretariat is raising awareness of the possible threat from the non-native Asian Hornet, *Vespa velutina.* Local recorders have an important role to play in the early detection of this potentially damaging species. Below is some information about the species, along with details of where to send records to for immediate impact, as well as some links to more information.



Asian Hornet, *Vespa velutina*

The Asian hornet is a large wasp which is poised to invade Britain. If it gains a foothold it will be bad for honey bees, native insects and pose a threat to human health. August and September are the months when it is most likely to be seen. It is relatively easy to identify and also makes large distinctive nests (often high up in trees). Government takes this issue seriously and has drawn up a plan to try to eradicate this species before it can establish in Britain. To do this, we need to find out immediately if it is spotted in this country. If you think you have seen this species please report your sighting straight away via the Alert system: alert_nonnative@ceh.co.uk



Asian Hornets entering a nest which is usually high up in a tree

Further information is available from these links:

Alert Poster

https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/nonnativespecies/downloadDocument.cfm?id=859

ID and info

https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=208

Tom Hunt

NESBReC NEWS produced by the **North East Scotland Biological Records Centre**.

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Contributions for future issues will be gratefully received.

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Website: www.nesbrec.org.uk
We are also on Facebook

NESBReC would like to thank everyone who has contributed articles and photos for this newsletter.