



Issue 2, Spring/Summer 2005

## A Glowing Report



John Tyler/Galaxy picture library

Female glow worm

Last year's appeal for sightings of Glow Worms, *Lampyris noctiluca*, across Scotland has turned up a fascinating set of records. New locations, both current and historical, were uncovered, some dating back to people's childhoods and even from a dusty 1890 tome. The result is that our knowledge of this fascinating species' distribution has been greatly extended and locally we have now collated 20 current and historic records of the species.

Jonathan Willet, co-ordinator of the survey, was very pleased with the results but is sure the picture is far from complete. "The sightings seem to have been more about where people *were* than where the Glow Worms *are*. I am convinced that there are many more colonies to be found. It does however seem that Argyll is a hotspot for Glow Worms, especially around Loch Awe, and Dumfries and Galloway is another area with no doubt many more sites waiting to be discovered."

So if you are outdoors at night this summer (e.g. moth trapping or even walking back from the pub!) keep an eye out for a small, pale-greenish glow in the grassy verges along roadsides and tracks. Anyone wishing to see Glow Worms at any of the confirmed current locations can contact the ERC for details. There are also a number of locations with historical records which have not been checked recently, and it would be very useful to find out if colonies still exist at these sites. A list of these is also available from the ERC and will be posted on the local biological recorders e-group (see back page) this summer.

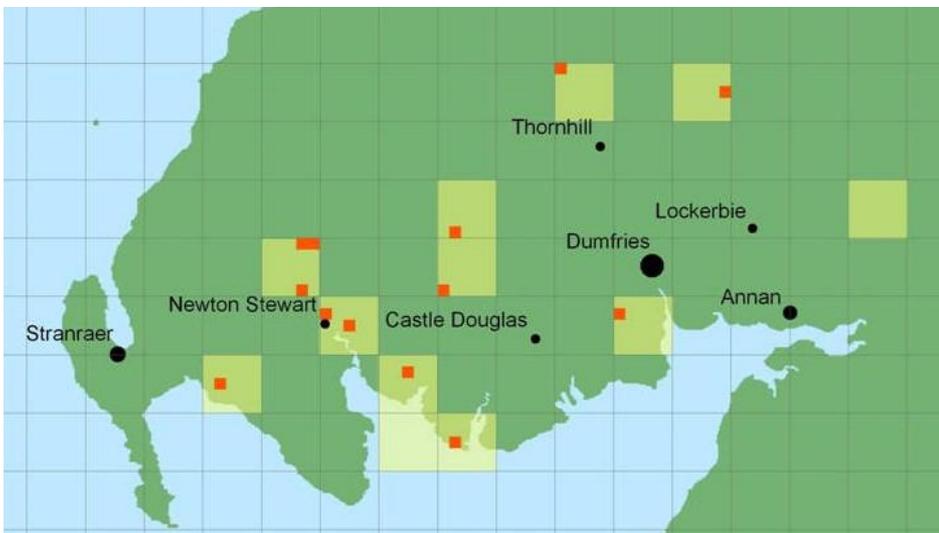
**Mark Pollitt**



Peacock Butterfly

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Current and historical Glow Worm sightings in Dumfries and Galloway

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY



# Invasive Species Threatens UK Ladybirds

Recorders, gardeners and the public are being asked to look out for an invasive species of ladybird which threatens to damage our native ladybird populations.

The Harlequin Ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*), a native of Asia, was introduced to America about 25 years ago for bio-control and it has since exploded in numbers. It has become by far the most common ladybird species in America and it is feared that this pattern will be

repeated in the UK. Many of our 46 species of the ladybird family (Coccinellidae) will be in direct competition with this aggressively invasive species, and some will not cope. The Harlequin poses a deadly threat to our beloved Seven-spot Ladybirds, as well as assorted butterflies, hoverflies and lacewings.

The Harlequin was first spotted in Britain in September 2004. Although this invader is so far largely confined to the south east of England, it has spread rapidly since its first sighting and has been spotted as far north as Lancashire. If the Harlequin reaches Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway may be one of the first regions affected.

Ladybirds feed on greenfly and other aphids, but the Harlequin out-competes native species for food with its voracious appetite. When greenfly numbers become diminished the Harlequin will turn on other ladybird species, but also preys on other insects, eating butterfly eggs, various caterpillar species and lacewing larvae.

It is critical to monitor this ladybird now, before it gets out of control and starts to affect our own British ladybird numbers. We are asking you to look at trees, bushes and plants in your garden and out in the

countryside, and record all the ladybirds you find. The ERC can provide a simple key to help you identify most of the common ladybirds on request.

To find out more visit [www.harlequin-survey.org](http://www.harlequin-survey.org) where you can find more details about the survey and how to send in records. Alternatively you can submit your records direct to the ERC (preferable with a photo so we can get an expert to confirm identification). Any records we receive will be passed on to the UK Harlequin Survey. If you are interested in carrying out a survey this summer you can email [ladybird-survey@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:ladybird-survey@ceh.ac.uk) for a survey methodology and form.

**Rebecca Johnson**

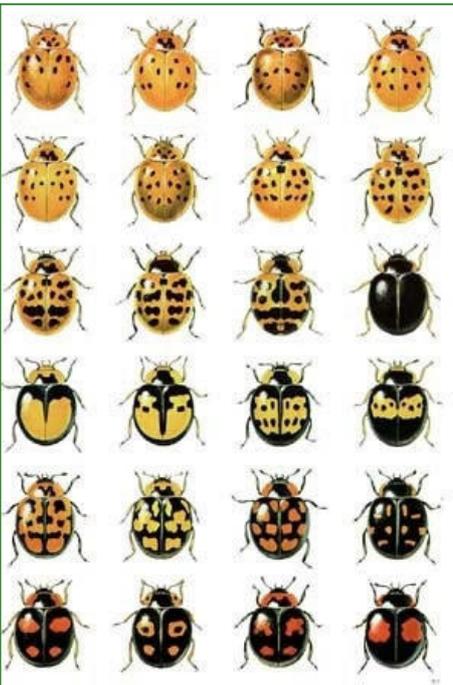
## How to spot a Harlequin...

Tend to be rounder in shape than most UK native species

Size - about 7-8mm long (similar in size to the common Seven-spot Ladybird)

Have a white plate just behind the head (pronotum) with fused black markings which can resemble an M-shape

Markings on the wing cases (elytra) are variable - commonest forms are orange with 15-20 spots or black with two/four orange or red spots



The many forms of the Harlequin

## Send in your Sightings!

We are always pleased to receive details of your wildlife sightings at the ERC. We will endeavour to share any information we receive at the Centre with other key groups - it's an important part of what we do. However, if you specialise in recording a particular taxonomic group (e.g. butterflies, dragonflies) you may wish to send your records direct to that group's local specialist co-ordinator. County recorders are experts in their field and often represent the national organisation dealing with the monitoring/conservation of that group. Importantly, they also have the detailed knowledge to help validate records to ensure that all the data we hold is as

accurate as possible. The ERC is endeavouring to set up data sharing arrangements with each of these groups to ensure records sent directly to county recorders also find their way back here to the Centre to be accessed locally, avoiding

the need to send in records to different people. The box below shows a few of the key contacts for the most commonly recorded species groups. Contact details for other groups are available on request from the ERC.

Species Type	Region/Area	Name/Organisation
Birds	Dumfries and Galloway	Paul Collin
Moths	Dumfries and Galloway	Jessie Mackay
Butterflies	Southwest Scotland	Richard Sutcliffe
Dragonflies	Scotland	Pat Batty
Plants	Dumfriesshire	Chris Miles
Plants	Kirkcudbrightshire	David Hawker
Plants	Wigtownshire	Alan Silverside
Red Squirrel Sightings	South Scotland	Red Squirrels in South Scotland

## ERC Update

The ERC has now been up and running for just over a year and already things are moving on apace. The Centre is beginning to find its feet and has already had much productive communication with many of the key organisations and individuals who hold data on the wildlife and habitats of our region. We already have access to over fifty key datasets, covering everything from statutory designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), habitat surveys and, of course, many thousands of species records.

Key to the process of bringing greater access to important local data is working in partnership with other data holders. Working with Scottish Wildlife Trust we have begun to bring together and update information on Local Wildlife Sites, sites which although not protected are recognised as being of considerable local importance for species and habitats in the region. We have established a data sharing arrangement with Red Squirrels in South Scotland, helping to improve access to squirrel sightings and pooling together data from other sources to provide a more complete picture of Red Squirrel sightings in

Dumfries and Galloway. Sharing information with the Scottish Squirrel Officer, we have been helping to provide an updated national picture of squirrel distribution. Information collated by the Centre has also been shared with Butterfly Conservation to contribute to the latest updated butterfly atlas and we are working with Scottish Badgers towards improving access to regional badger data, including road casualties.

In partnership with the local Education Department, this autumn we are hoping to pilot a bird watching project in a sample of schools across Dumfries and Galloway. The project will encourage a network of schools to take a scientific approach to recording the birds they see at feeding stations in the school grounds and help them to share their findings with other schools, linking simple biological recording with IT and communication skills.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who has sent in records of their sightings to the Centre. Please do continue to send them in, and help to expand our knowledge of the region's wildlife.

**Mark Pollitt**

## New Biodiversity Data Officer



The DGERC was sorry to see the departure of one of their staff, Nicola Stringer, earlier this year. However, we are delighted to

w e l c o m e  
Rebecca Johnson who joined the Centre in April as the new Biodiversity Data Officer.

Rebecca recently graduated from the University of Glasgow where she studied for an honours degree in Zoology. Rebecca has always had a keen interest in the environment and took part in a conservation expedition to Trinidad in 2001. On leaving University she travelled extensively throughout Asia and Australia and recently returned to the UK to begin a career in the environmental sector.

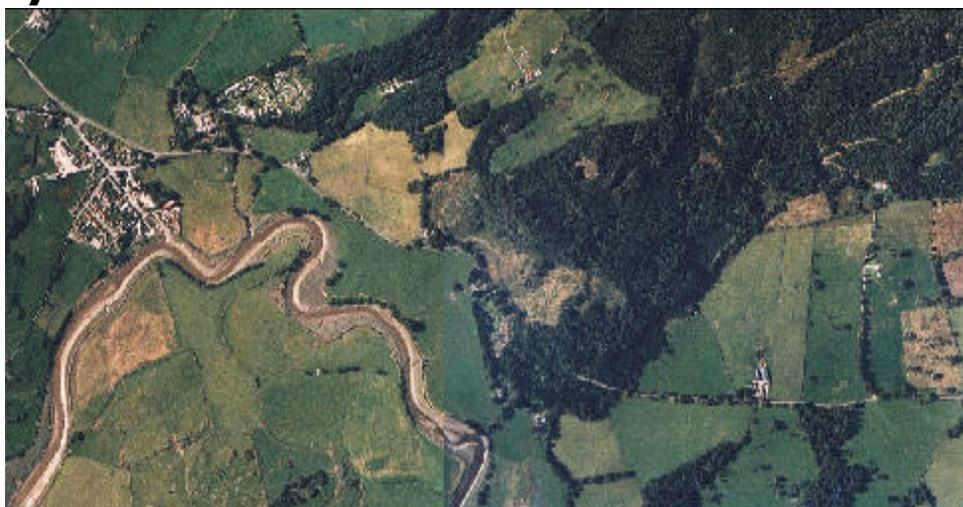
Rebecca is pleased to gain her first full-time job in the environmental sector and is eager to develop her skills at the Centre. "I'm really excited to be starting work at the ERC and looking forward to meeting all the people I will be working with."

We can't promise any Kangaroos or Koalas, but I'm sure Beccy will soon feel at home with Dumfries and Galloway's wealth of wildlife.

**Mark Pollitt**

## Aerial Photography Resources at the ERC

The ERC currently holds a complete set of high resolution aerial photographs for the whole of the Dumfries and Galloway region. We can produce digital or hardcopy images of any part of the region at your request, plus we offer a variety of other services. Please contact Rebecca Johnson or Mark Pollitt at the Centre for more details.



Aerial photograph of Palnackie and surrounding area



# Grey Squirrel Alert!

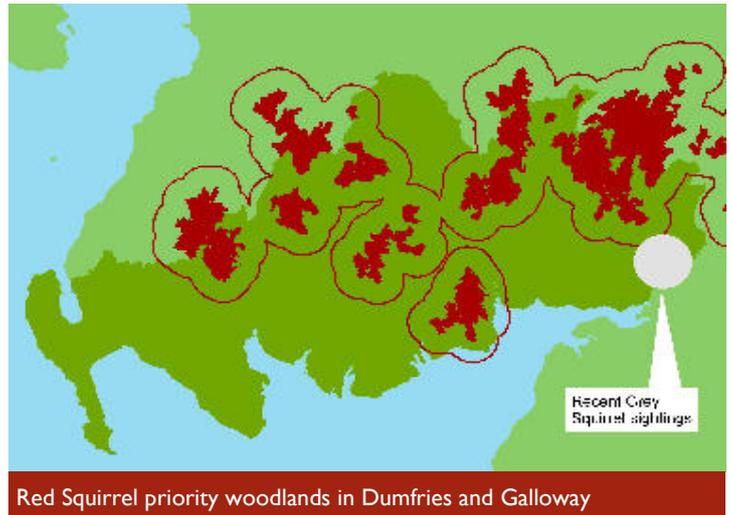
There has been an alarming increase in Grey Squirrel sightings in the area between Canonbie and Langholm over the last few months. The Red Squirrels in South Scotland project is currently working to secure appropriate management for Red Squirrel conservation in Priority Woodlands – large conifer plantations (over 200ha) of which represent the core area for the species in Dumfries and Galloway. The project is working with forest owners and managers to ensure that the species mix and age structure in these Priority Woodlands will sustain Red Squirrel populations in the long term. The main threat to Red Squirrels is the movement of Grey Squirrels, down from central Scotland and up from northern England. Grey Squirrels have a competitive advantage over Red Squirrels in broadleaved and mixed woodland, due to their ability to feed more efficiently on large seeds such as acorns. In addition to out-competing the Red Squirrels for food, Grey Squirrels may also introduce poxvirus. Greys are unaffected by the virus but act as a carrier for the disease, which is fatal to Reds. So far, there have been no outbreaks of poxvirus in Scotland.

It is essential that all sightings are reported to the Red Squirrel Conservation Officer or to DGERC, and that Grey control and poxvirus testing is carried out along the Eskdale

river corridor. To report sightings, or for more information on Red Squirrel conservation, please contact Sue Hearn, Red Squirrel Conservation Officer for Dumfries & Galloway at Red Squirrels in South Scotland, Studio 2, Lindean Mill, Galashiels, Selkirkshire TD1 3PE.

Tel: 01750 725157 Mobile: 07733 121837 email: sue@red-squirrels.org.uk.

## Sue Hearn, Red Squirrels in South Scotland



# Plant Recording in Dumfries & Galloway



Botanising in Dumfries & Galloway can be very rewarding with habitats varying from upland peaks with alpine flora, to coastal grassland and saltmarsh with elements of flora of the mild south-west of England or Wales. At the latest count

there were approximately 800 different species and hybrids of trees, plants and ferns growing in the wild in Kirkcudbrightshire alone. There are new plants being discovered here every year and we still don't know the full extent of the distribution of many plants in the region. The records have been gathered by dedicated amateurs and professionals alike over the past 40 years and collated by the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) which is THE organisation for UK plant recording. It brings together people interested in plants through arranging field meetings, projects like the recently completed New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora, rare plant monitoring and plant identification skills. It also produces various dedicated publications, Yearbooks and BSBI News. We've got two field meetings in the region this year – try one, even as a non-member you'd be very welcome.

Bearing in mind that there's

approximately 2500 square miles in the Region and only 11 members of the BSBI resident in Dumfries & Galloway (4 in Kirkcudbrightshire), that's a lot of dedicated work and effort. If you'd like to join this regionally small group and help with projects and recording, please contact me for further details:

David Hawker, Windywalls, Gatehouse of Fleet, Castle Douglas DG7 2DE, phone 01557 814249 or e-mail david\_hawker@quista.net.

## David Hawker, BSBI Recorder Kirkcudbrightshire



Looking toward Castlehill Point

# The Dumfries & Galloway Black Grouse Recovery Project

Black Grouse are beautiful, charismatic birds inhabiting the interface of farmland, woodland and moorland. In recent decades there has been a huge reduction in numbers, thought to be due to a combination of habitat loss through maturation of conifer plantations, degradation of their moorland habitat through overgrazing and intensification on farmland.

Black Grouse have become one of the fastest declining bird species in the UK, a Red Data bird and of the highest priority in both National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The national survey is taking place this year; the last one was carried out in 1995-96. There were an estimated 350 lekking males left in Dumfries and Galloway at that time, which represented about 7% of the UK population. Now there are believed to be only about 150 lekking males left in the region.

Black Grouse are at their most active during dawn and dusk in April and May. The males (blackcock) come to-



Chris Gomersall

Two Blackcock displaying at a lek

gether on special areas called 'leks', to display. The females (greyhens) visit the lek and decide which is the best male to mate with. Monitoring these traditional lek sites is the method used to monitor how the population is faring from one year to the next.

If you happen to have seen or heard Black Grouse when you've been out walking,

then all records (including location and date) would be very welcome. If anyone would be interested in volunteering for cold-searching areas or monitoring leks please contact Yvonne Boles on 01556 670478 or email [yvonne.boles@rspb.org.uk](mailto:yvonne.boles@rspb.org.uk).

**Yvonne Boles, RSPB**

## Volunteering at the ERC

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills while contributing to a worthwhile cause. The ERC relies heavily on the contribution of volunteers who kindly give up their time to help out with various projects. At the moment we are pleased to have two regular volunteers, Richard Ritty and Bruce Robertson, who come into the office once a week to work on our database. We would be very pleased to receive more help from volunteers.

Are you interested in volunteering at the ERC? Do you have spare time on your hands and want to learn a new skill? Do you have a keen interest in wildlife, or even a particular species or

habitat? Would you like to computerise your own records or those of a local wildlife group? We are always looking for extra help at the Centre so if you are interested and can spare a few hours per week we would like to hear from you. Most of the volunteering work at the Centre involves computers, but the ERC would be more than happy to train volunteers in the software we use. Whether you're retired and seeking a way to help the region's environment, or you're a graduate who is between jobs and would like to advance your IT skills, the ERC would like to hear from you.

We are also currently seeking a volunteer to work on inputting some historical plant

records for Kirkcudbrightshire. Do you have an interest in botany and/or a good local knowledge of the area? If you would like to help out call Rebecca or Mark on 01387 247543.

**Rebecca Johnson**



# Open Day & Wildlife Walk

On Wednesday 13th April the Dumfries and Galloway Environmental Resources Centre held an Open Day so that members of the public could come and see what happens to their wildlife records after they send them in to the Centre. There was an excellent turnout with around 20



Walking along the banks of the River Nith

participants coming along to take part in a Wildlife Walk, along with a photographer from the Dumfries and Galloway Standard. A huge range of people took part, from beginners to experienced recorders.

The group walked through the Crichton grounds, down to the banks of the River Nith and back again, trying to spot as many species as they could and noting down their position using a Global Positioning System (GPS). The target for the day was to record 100 species of animals, plants and fungi. Despite some early rain it turned out to be a beautiful sunny day and, with the help of all the participants, over 200 species were recorded! The highlight, for some at least, was a fleeting view of a Kingfisher on the River Nith. It just goes to show that a huge amount of biodiversity exists right on our doorstep. On the group's



Young recorders looking for frog spawn

return to the ERC, Mark Pollitt gave a demonstration of how data is input and analysed and the group discussed some possible applications for the information held at the Centre.

The Open Day was a huge success and everyone seemed to have lots of fun while learning something about the work of the ERC. A big thank you to all who attended.

**Rebecca Johnson**

## Seal Tagging

In the UK there are a number of seal rehabilitation units releasing seals into the sea after various periods of stabilisation, treatment and rehabilitation. Many of these are released with some form of tag inserted in the hind flipper, or occasionally with 'hats' or coloured spots on their heads (see photograph below). Some tags carry telephone numbers to contact if



A 'hattie' about to be released to the sea

they are found on an animal on the shore. In many circumstances however, tags are sighted at sea without any contact numbers being discernible.

Even if no tag number is visible, any reports of sighted tags are of great benefit to rehabilitators as they attempt to build up information on survivability and dispersal of released animals. We are recording seal sightings on our database here at the ERC and we are passing on information on tagged individuals to the UK Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC). If you spot a seal on the Dumfries and Galloway coast keep an eye out for any tags and send the details in to us as usual.

MARC is a loose affiliation of rescue

organisations and therefore does not have a website, but if you would like to learn more you can check out the British Divers Marine Life Rescue website ([www.bdmlr.org.uk](http://www.bdmlr.org.uk)) for further details of the type of work being done on the rehabilitation of marine mammals.

**Rebecca Johnson**



# Grass Snake Population in Dumfries and Galloway?

Read any textbook and it will tell you that Grass Snakes (*Natrix natrix*) are abundant (though declining) in England and Wales but absent in Scotland, but recently, here at the ERC, we have received details of a number of sightings in Dumfries and Galloway.

So could there be a new population of Grass Snakes in Dumfries and Galloway? This would be an exciting addition to reptile biodiversity in the area.

People often mistake Grass Snakes for Adders (*Vipera berus*) but they are actually quite distinct. Adult Grass Snakes are usually 70-120 cm in length, although females are larger than males and have been known to reach up to 200cm! They are typically grey-green in colour, often with black markings down their sides and a yellow or cream collar (they do not have the distinctive zigzag marking on their backs that adders do). Black lines run down from their large eyes to their top lip and they have a round pupil (Adders do not). Their underside is usually white or pale yellow with blue-black and white markings.



The Grass Snake, *Natrix natrix*, with its distinctive round pupil and yellow collar

## Grass Snake Facts!

Grass Snakes are excellent swimmers and often hunt in the water. They can stay under water for up to an hour without coming up for air.

Grass Snakes are declining and are therefore protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 from being killed, injured or sold.

Although grass snakes produce a venomous secretion that is toxic to small animals, they are harmless to humans.

When threatened, Grass Snakes puff up their bodies and hiss loudly in an attempt to frighten the predator away. If contact is made, they emit a foul-smelling liquid and if this fails to put off an attacker, they roll over on to their backs and play dead.

The grass snake is the UK's largest terrestrial reptile and our only egg-laying snake.

Grass snakes can live for up to 25 years.

So where might you be able to spot a Grass Snake? Well, they favour damp habitats with long grass including river banks, ponds and ditches, but they also inhabit hedgerows, woodland margins,

farmland and meadows. The snakes are active during the day and spend time basking in the sun to warm up. They hibernate from October to March, often communally in old rabbit burrows, wall crevices, in piles of manure or under tree roots.

Next time you are out and about in the countryside remember to watch out for these beautiful creatures. And don't forget to send any records of Adders or Grass Snakes to the ERC. If you can't identify the species, send a photograph with your record and we can get it identified by an expert.

**Rebecca Johnson**



Grass Snakes are often mistaken for Adders (pictured above)



## Dumfries & Galloway Environmental Resources Centre

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Manager

**Rebecca Johnson**

Biodiversity Data Officer

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Rebecca Johnson.

*Dumfries & Galloway Environmental Resources Centre is a not-for-profit organisation which will further the appreciation, understanding and protection of the natural environment of Dumfries & Galloway by collecting, collating, managing and safeguarding relevant data and providing a focal point through which anyone may access this information.*

*The Centre welcomes any records of wildlife sightings from the region. To be of greatest use, each record should have the following information:*

- ♦ Date
- ♦ Place/location – including a 6-figure grid reference where possible
- ♦ Species – either common or scientific name
- ♦ Count – optional, but often very useful
- ♦ Observer/recorder – your name and contact details

*Records submitted to the Centre will be used for environmental decision-making, education, research and other public benefit uses.*

*More information about the services and information we can supply is available from the Centre staff.*

The ERC is grateful to the following organizations who have contributed funding or in-kind support for the development of the Centre:



## A regional outpost

Recording your sightings has never been easier if you live in the Gatehouse area. The Mill on the Fleet now have copies of our recording forms available at the visitor centre where details of other interesting local sightings will be available.

You can also drop your recording forms at the Mill and they will be passed on to the ERC. We also hope to provide information about the ERC and relevant events via the Mill visitor centre.

## Online forum for recorders in Dumfries and Galloway

If you have access to the internet and would like to keep up to date with developments at the DGERC and with events relating to biological recording in our region, visit the homepage of the new online recorder's forum. The group (Biological Recording In the Dumfries and Galloway rEgion – BRIDGE for short) has been established to enable those interested in biological recording in the Dumfries & Galloway region to share their knowledge and interests. The aim is to provide group members with information about events, surveys and activities, both local and national, taking place in the region and to enable members to share knowledge and sightings that may be of interest to others. Membership is free and open to anyone. To join, just visit

[www.smartgroups.com/groups/bridge](http://www.smartgroups.com/groups/bridge)

## Diary of forthcoming events

### June

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>**, National Wildlife Week. See [www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk).

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup>**. World Oceans Day. See [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org) for further details.

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>. 10am - 5pm** British Dragonfly Society Field Trip - The Trossachs. Contact Jonathan Willet on 01236 780 636 for more information.

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>**. Visit to Feoch Meadow, Ayrshire, Lockerbie Wildlife Trust. Meet at Lockerbie Town Hall - time TBA. Contact Jim Rae on 01376 203 314 for more information.

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>. 9.15am - 4.05pm** Solway Firth Partnership Conference 2005. Easterbrook Hall, The Crichton, Dumfries. Contact Jeremy Roberts on 01387 247 543 for more information or to book.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 26<sup>th</sup>. 10am - 5pm** British Dragonfly Society Field Trip - Kintail. Contact Babs Souter on 01599 566 325 or [bsouter@nts.org.uk](mailto:bsouter@nts.org.uk) for more information.

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> 10am** Riparian Mammal Day, Dumfries and Galloway Mammal Group. Talk and workshops on the water vole, water shrew and otter. Contact Stuart Spray on 07810 814 554 for more information.

### July

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>, International Moth Day and Night** See [www.nationalmothnight.info](http://www.nationalmothnight.info) for more details.

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup>, 10am - 5pm** Insects and Their Bat Predators course. BaTML. For more information see the Bats and the Millennium link website, [www.batml.org.uk](http://www.batml.org.uk).

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>, 5.05am - 7.05am** Sunrise Survey. Bat Conservation Trust. For more information go to [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk).

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>**, International Bog Day. See [www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk) for further details.

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>, 4.15am** Dawn Bat Swarm Survey, Dumfries and Galloway Bat Group. Long Wood, Mabie Forest. Meet on lay-by on Dalbeattie Road just past The Hills FSC car park. Contact Stuart Spray on 07810 814 554 for more information.

### August

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> - Thursday 4<sup>th</sup>. 9am - 3pm** National Bat Conference, BaTML. York. For more information see the Bats and the Millennium link website, [www.batml.org.uk](http://www.batml.org.uk).

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup>, 8pm** Bat Night, Lockerbie Wildlife Trust. Meet at Dryfesdale cemetery car park.

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup>**, European Bat Weekend / Night. More details can be found at [www.eurobats.org](http://www.eurobats.org).

If you wish to advertise your event (free!) please contact Rebecca Johnson at the ERC.