

# erc NEWS

Issue 4, Summer 2006

## Think local...

Dumfries and Galloway is blessed with many sites of national and international importance for wildlife. Ninety seven sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and some of these and other areas are further recognised on an international level as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Ramsar sites and Special Areas of Conservation. Yet away from these designated sites, most of us will know of many other species-rich, diverse sites of interest for their local wildlife and habitats which form an equally important part of Dumfries and Galloway's natural character. Such gems are more vulnerable to loss or damage since they are not afforded any statutory recognition or legal protection. Thankfully, within Dumfries and Galloway as in many other parts of Scotland there are systems in place to identify such sites and to offer them some recognition in the planning process for their biodiversity value. Such sites are currently known as Local Wildlife Sites, although they may in future come to be known as 'Local Biodiversity Sites'.

In the late 1990s, a group of local organisations led by Scottish Wildlife Trust began a program of identifying and surveying sites in order to gather information upon

which to assess each candidate site's value, a process which continues today. The survey information and existing wildlife records are gathered and each site is assessed by a team of local experts to identify their value for locally important species and habitats. As well as the site's value for biodiversity, other factors such as its educational and recreation uses are also taken into account. Sites reaching an agreed criteria are then classified as Local Wildlife Sites, their boundaries mapped and survey information stored at the DGERC. Subsequently the information is shared with relevant organisations to ensure these sites are recognised and accounted for in local decision-making processes.

An equally important part of the process is working with the site owners. Site assessment only occurs with the landowners consent and he/she receives a copy of the survey report detailing the wildlife and habitats found on their land. Where possible, management advice on maintaining the key wildlife and habitats has also been provided to site owners and managers.

At present there are 45 Local Wildlife Sites in the region (map below) covering a wide array of habitats, everything from raised bogs to

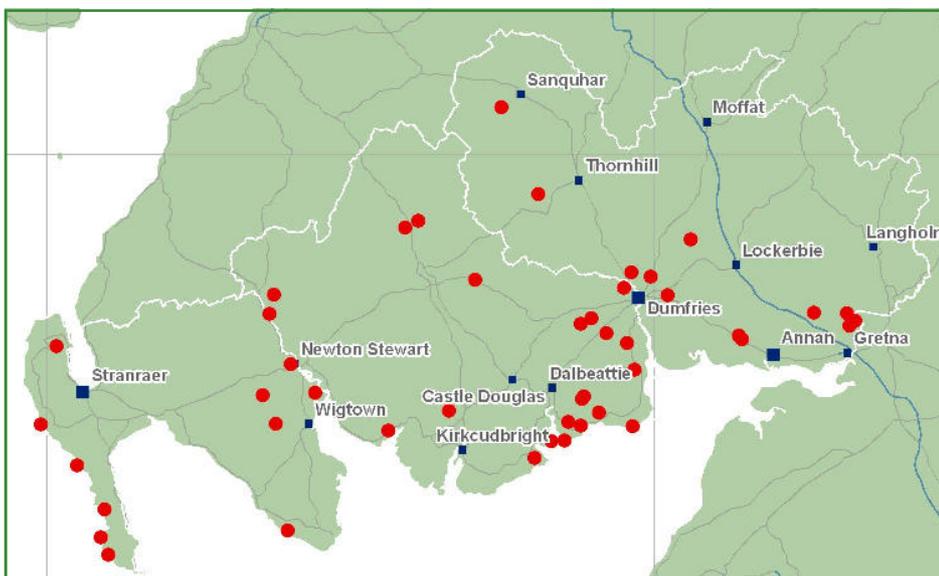
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Castlehill Point – species-rich coastal habitats and a Local Wildlife Site.

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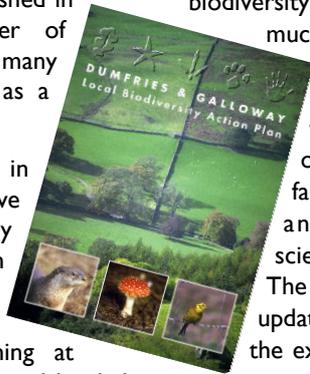


Local Wildlife Sites in Dumfries and Galloway

## Local Biodiversity Action Planning – your chance to get involved

The Dumfries and Galloway Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) was published in June 1999. It was the first comprehensive LBAP published in Scotland, won a number of awards, and was used by many other LBAP Partnerships as a template for good practice.

Many of the actions listed in the 1999 D&G LBAP have now been successfully completed, as reported in the Progress Reports of 2001 and 2005. However, Biodiversity Action Planning at local, national and international levels has developed enormously in the last seven years. Biodiversity research has uncovered much new information both locally and nationally, and this has led to new developments in conservation management. As a result, many of the 1999 D&G LBAP actions are no longer applicable or have been superseded. The time is now right for a complete review of the Dumfries & Galloway LBAP.



The 1999 D&G LBAP contained, for the first time in one document, a huge volume of information about the biodiversity of Dumfries & Galloway, much of it collated by local experts, both professional and amateur, working in a wide range of different areas of biodiversity, including farming, forestry, freshwater and marine management, scientific research, and education. The 2006/07 LBAP Review will update this information, building on the experience gained over the last seven years, again using the local knowledge and expertise of as many people as possible. This will be presented in a new Local Biodiversity Action Plan, to be published in 2007 or 2008.

At this stage, although there are many ideas about what a new LBAP may look like and contain, there are no firm plans. As the politicians say 'nothing has been ruled in, and nothing has been ruled out'. Everyone who wants to get involved in the Review, at whatever level of detail they wish, will be welcome. For more details, contact:

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Perennial Flax *Linum perenne* – a nationally scarce plant and LBAP Priority Species. The population at Brighouse Bay is the only one in Scotland.

## Watch out for alien invaders...

A new survey of invasive plants has been launched this summer by Plantlife. Recorders are asked to look out for three of the UK's most destructive plant invaders – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and New Zealand Pygmyweed – in order to gain a better understanding of the extent to which our countryside and gardens are under threat. Imported plants can be fast growing and can quickly become invasive in the countryside. They can damage



natural habitats, out-competing native plants and blocking up ponds and rivers. Most problem species have escaped from gardens and some are still sold in garden centres. Controlling and eradicating them is hard work and can cost millions of pounds.

Results from the survey will be passed to the DGERC and any records sent in direct to the DGERC will be passed to Plantlife to help with the survey. For more details visit the Plantlife website at [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk).

## Sightings and strandings of marine wildlife

The coastal waters around Dumfries and Galloway are important homes and migratory routes for many species of marine wildlife. Basking Sharks, turtles and numerous species of cetacean have been recorded around the Solway Firth, although we still know relatively little about their distribution and movement in and around the region's coastal waters. Recording sightings of these species, whether from boat or from land, can help us and other organisations concerned with the marine environment to gain a better picture of their use of the Solway. The success of the Solway Shark Watch project highlighted the region's importance for Basking Sharks and turtles, but with the sad death of Norman Hammond, survey co-ordinator, sightings of these species have since dwindled. There is a desire to resurrect this work and ensure that marine monitoring in the Solway Firth grows once again, and a range of partners are currently investigating options to take this forward. Whilst having a co-ordinated survey combining casual records and effort-based monitoring is the goal, you can still help by sending in details of any sightings of these species. If you spot whales, dolphins, porpoises, sharks, turtles or any other marine wildlife, please send your records to the DGERC.

Of course you may also come across stranded cetaceans or turtles on the shoreline. Strandings should be reported to the Scottish Agricultural Centre's Veterinary Investigation Centre in Inverness or to the Natural History Museum in London, but please let the DGERC know too. If you report the details direct to us we will pass the information on immediately to the SAC. If the animal is still alive you should first contact the SSPCA with a view to keeping the animal alive and returning it to the sea.

### Contact details to report whale, dolphin and turtle strandings

DGERC:	01387 247543
SAC Inverness:	01463 243030
NHM London:	0207 942 5155
SSPCA:	0131 339 0111

### Local Wildlife Sites (Continued from page 1)

broad-leaved ancient woodlands, from large lochs to small community wetlands. The process is an ongoing one, and one which everyone hopes will continue to provide recognition for a growing number of sites supporting locally important habitats and species. We hope future developments will include the addition of a complimentary list of sites of geological importance (Local Geodiversity Sites).

# The recording year

## so far ...

Following the mammal identification courses carried out under the Mammal Guardians Project we have received a steady supply of mammal records, totalling over 150 so far. These have included a few positive records of Water Voles *Arvicola terrestris* at sites in Galloway Forest Park (e.g. around Glentroot and Holm), although many of the former sites surveyed as part of the SNH-funded survey have yielded no positive signs of their continued presence. Otters *Lutra lutra* are widespread and many of the new mammal recorders found spraints on local watercourses (though none could beat the 19 found at one spot under a bridge in Langholm by Rob Strachan, our Riparian Mammal Course trainer). A recent survey of bats conducted for NTS at its Threave Estate has found the presence of a roost of our region's rarest bat – the Whiskered Bat *Myotis mystacinus*. Around 30 individuals were recorded, an excellent find for Dumfries and Galloway. Six other species were also located with 15 roosts in total found on the Estate.

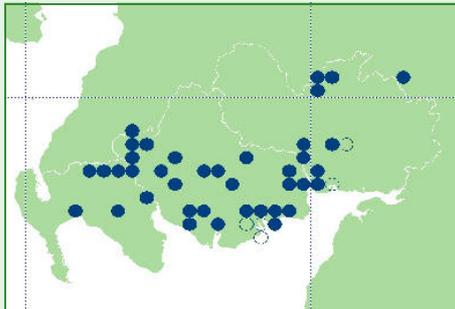
Research on the region's Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* continues this summer with radio transmitters being fitted to birds to investigate their feeding patterns and ranges. Early attempts to catch them were hampered by the birds absence from one of the key trapping sites, but at the time of writing three birds have been caught in the Bennan and Laurieston areas and fitted with transmitters. A team of people are currently tracking their every move – we hope to report on the results and findings in a future newsletter. Elsewhere, Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* returned to breed again in the region and have continued to provide visitors and locals with fantastic views of the



Bedstraw Hawk-moth – a rare migrant visitor to Dumfries and Galloway.

nest via CCTV in the Wigtown County Buildings.

Confirmation of a record of the tiny micro-moth *Monochroa lucidella* at RSPB Mersehead reserve in 2005 was received, only the second record of this species in Scotland. Elsewhere a Bedstraw Hawkmoth *Hyles gallii* was trapped at light in Dalry by Jessie Mackay, County Moth Recorder. This migrant, an uncommon visitor to the region, was also recorded in 2005 and a larvae reared successfully by Jessie (see photo). The Red-necked Footman *Atolmis rubricollis*, formerly a locally scarce moth, continues to expand its range with records now from at least 28 10 km squares in the region.



Distribution of Red-necked Footman in Dumfries and Galloway (solid circles - 2000 onwards, hollow circles - pre-2000).

Moth recording continues to grow and interest can only be fuelled by the news that funding has been secured for the development of a national recording scheme to be led by Butterfly Conservation. Peter Norman, Biodiversity Officer for Dumfries and Galloway Council recorded several individuals of the River Skater *Aquarius najas* close to a known site for this rare species. Closely related to its commoner pond-favouring cousins, the species favours flowing water and is known from only four 10km squares in Scotland, all of which are in Dumfries and Galloway. And to demonstrate how easy making interesting discoveries can be, fellow Solway Heritage staff member Nic Coombey spotted an unusual insect at the office window. On consulting the field guides the species was positively identified as *Leucozona lucorum*, a common species of hoverfly but one not recorded previously in NX97. Expanding the collective knowledge of some of the



*Leucozona lucorum*

under-recorded taxa can be amazingly simple!

A new site for the rare Sticky Catchfly has been discovered on the Kirkcudbrightshire coast by Anna White and Jim McCleary. The species, whose regional populations are on south-facing coastal cliffs, is scarce at a national level and a priority species in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). A recent BSBI meeting in the Merrick Hills found several new populations of LBAP plants, including a large area of Spignel *Meum athamanticum* totaling over 1,000 flowering plants. Other notable finds included Alpine Saw-wort *Saussurea alpina* on Drigmorn Hill. Elsewhere, Pauline Swettenham found Square-stemmed Willowherb *Epilobium tetragonum* near Drummore, a species found more commonly in southern England and with very few records in the Scotland.

Perhaps the most unusual sight of all was a Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus* which became stranded at Barlocco Isle near Borgue and subsequently died. The species is the second largest cetacean species, and the mature adult male measured 18.9m long and weighed an estimated 60 tonnes. The species favours deep waters and as such is rarely seen from onshore around the British Isles. Elsewhere there were a number of Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* strandings reported, including one on the Nith at Glencaple. We would be particularly keen to receive records of cetaceans and other marine mammals and reptiles around the coast so please let us know if you spot live or dead animals around the coast. Larry Griffin (WWT researcher) reported a mass stranding of Sea Gooseberries *Pleurobrachia pileus* on the Lochar Channel at Stanhope Merse. Larry estimates that around half a million individuals were involved, with c.500 per m2 present along a 1km stretch of shoreline.



The Fin Whale at Barlocco Isle – now buried on the island.



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*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.*

Cover image behind ERC text: Bee visiting flower

*The ERC is grateful to the following organisations who have contributed funding or in-kind support for the development of the Centre and its projects:*



Heritage

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Dumfries & Galloway  
COUNCIL

## New Butterfly Atlas for SW Scotland

The Glasgow and South West Scotland Branch of Butterfly Conservation has recently published the first regional atlas of the butterflies found in South West Scotland. The book summarises the results of the survey of butterflies in the branch area – Dumfries & Galloway, Ayrshire, Greater Glasgow, Dunbartonshire, Stirlingshire and Argyll & the Isles – undertaken during 1995 - 2004. There are colour maps for each of the 32 species showing distribution and abundance.



The book is, however, more than a series of maps. It is beautifully illustrated with over 150 colour photographs showing all the butterflies recorded in the area. There is also a site guide in the book which describes many of the best places to see butterflies in southwest Scotland. A 'must buy' for local lepidopterists...

*Congratulations to all involved – Dumfries and Galloway has very few works showing the regional status of our flora and fauna, and few of these are up to date – lets hope it is the first of many such publications. Ed.*

## Shoreline recording

This July we are running an informal workshop/recording at Brighthouse Bay looking at coastal recording, focussing more specifically on the littoral zone and marine molluscs in particular. Jim Logan, a retired marine biologist, will be leading the day helping a small group of recorders learn more about conchological recording. It is possible that we may be able to hold similar days at other locations later in the year – if you didn't make the July day but would be interested in future events, let us know and we'll aim to organise future events in suitable locations.



## Itchy and scratchy?

Do you have fleas? If your biological recording work involves contact with mammal or birds, particularly their nests, you may be able to help collect samples of fleas for the Siphonaptera Recording Scheme. There are approximately 60 species of flea in Britain, and records from Dumfries and Galloway are few and far between. The DGERC can provide guidelines on collecting and storing samples, which can be sent for analysis to the national expert. For more information contact DGERC or to learn more about flea recording contact the Siphonaptera Recording Scheme organiser: Mr R.S. George, 54 Richmond Park Avenue, Bournemouth BH8 9DR.

## Bumble bee identification

Interested in learning how to identify bumble bees? The Natural History Museum website has an excellent interactive identification guide, and has created a credit-card sized identification guide for the commonest six species. Visit the NHM Bombus pages at [www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/projects/bombus](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/projects/bombus). Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC) also have some pages on bumble bee identification, and have a downloadable recording form available on their website – visit [www.bris.org.uk/bbsurvey.php](http://www.bris.org.uk/bbsurvey.php).

There have been several books published in recent years giving good information on bumble bee identification, distribution and ecology. For identification check out the 'Field Guide to Bumblebees of Britain & Ireland' by Edwards and Jenner, or for more on their ecology try the newly published 'Bumblebees' in the Collins New Naturalists series.

