



A new home...

An update from the DGERC manager...

Welcome to the 10th issue of ERC News. It's hard to believe that it is almost eight years since the first newsletter was published in autumn 2004, but time flies when you are having fun!

Unfortunately, not all of 2011 was fun, as the year proved to be the Centre's most testing and challenging so far. Our host organisation Solway Heritage fell victim to the harsh economic climate, winding down its activities and leaving DGERC in search of a new home and without a parent organisation to host us. For a time there was even uncertainty as to whether the Centre would still exist. Thankfully, after many meetings and discussions, a way forward was identified and Southern

Uplands Partnership (SUP) stepped in to become the Centre's new host organisation. Partners and contacts identified a few potential offices and by October we were relocated in our new home at Kirkgunzeon (pictured above). We're very lucky to have such a lovely office space located in a wonderful rural location. It even opens up opportunities to run some events at the Centre itself, such as our moth night this summer (see events programme). I'm looking forward to the first summer here, discovering the wildlife that shares the surrounding area - the first Orange-tips and Green Veined White butterflies are already on the wing by the office and Swallows are nesting in the adjacent outbuildings.



Our new neighbours...

I must take this opportunity to offer my thanks to everyone who has supported DGERC during these difficult times: our Steering Group members for their efforts in guiding us through the process, our funding partners for their understanding and additional financial support, our volunteers for their continuing work and help when moving offices, and of course not forgetting the wildlife recorders who sent us emails and messages of support and encouragement.

As with many charitable organisations, raising funds to continue our work remains a considerable challenge. I'm delighted to announce that Scottish Natural Heritage continues to support DGERC through its grant scheme, and we now have a three-year funding package until 2015. Dumfries and Galloway Council has also continued its Service Level Agreement with the Centre this year.

Together, this funding goes part way to supporting one post at the Centre, and as the Bugs in Gardens project comes to a close, we are currently applying for funding for a new project which would employ a new project officer. Keep your fingers crossed for us!

Bugs in Gardens

Our popular Bugs in Gardens (BiG) project comes to an end this spring. However, that doesn't stop you continuing to record ladybirds, bumblebees and other invertebrates you find at home our out and about. And that goes for other wildlife too! I'm happy to help with identification if you send in photos.

Finally, I must say a big thank you to our recent project officers Lisa Ferguson and Bernadette Noake who worked on the BiG project in 2011 and 2012. Both have now moved on to new jobs elsewhere and I'm sure you will join me in wishing both of them every success in the future.

Mark Pollitt, DGERC Manager

Last year of the National Dragonfly Atlas

2012 is the last year of recording for the National Dragonfly Atlas. Please make an effort to record your dragonfly sightings this year so that we can make coverage of Dumfries and Galloway as comprehensive as possible. If you'd like help with learning to identify them, DGERC will be holding a Dragonfly identification day on Wednesday 25 July (venue to be confirmed) - please contact the office if you are interested in attending.



Can you find the mightiest mushroom?

A series of events is currently being finalised in Dumfries and Galloway this autumn to enable you to discover the mysterious world of fungi. All fungi play a mighty important role in our environment: they recycle our waste, provide nutrients for more than 90% of our plants to grow, and are essential for healthy habitats, including woods, fields and soil. But this autumn, we will also be searching for a different kind of mighty mushroom - the biggest single specimen in the region (by weight). In order to help you, a series of forays across the region have been organised, including some with visiting national experts and others with tasting opportunities. These will show you what to look for and where to look; culminating in 'Fungus Friday' on 5th October when, as well as judging and prize-giving of the Mighty Mushroom, there will be fungus displays, mushroom tasting, an opportunity to get your mushrooms identified by an expert and a view into the microscopic world of fungi. There will be a prize for the finder of the Mighty Mushroom, but definitely no requirement for previous experience or special skills. Instead the emphasis will be on informative and enjoyable events. However, if there is a competitive streak in you, the largest British Giant Puffball ever measured was 162 cm (64 in) in circumference, weighing around 20 kg,



A monster bolete - over 30cm across
©Mark Pollitt

whilst the world record is a Chinese specimen over 10m long and weighing more than half a tonne!

If you would like to receive full details as soon as they are available, contact Peter Norman, Biodiversity Officer 01387 260172
peter.norman@dumgal.gov.uk

Feeling sociable? Join us on Facebook and Twitter!

DGERC have now entered the world of social media! So keep in touch by 'liking' our Facebook page or following our tweets.

www.twitter.com/dgerc

www.facebook.com/dgerc





A place in the sun...

Who would have thought that Dumfries and Galloway would be a hotspot for a group of species that are most at home when the sun shines? Perhaps surprisingly, our region is indeed one of the best in Scotland for reptiles, and is currently the only one hosting all five of our native Scottish species. Mark Pollitt explains more...

Reptiles are what we call cold-blooded creatures. Being unable to maintain their own body temperature, they rely on using their environment to help them warm up or cool down. Scientifically they are referred to as 'ectothermic'. This need for warmth makes spring and autumn the best times to see our terrestrial species, as at this time of year they spend more of their time basking to raise their body temperature. In summer, they warm up much more quickly and spend far less time basking. Unlike their amphibian cousins, reptiles have scales which help to protect them from abrasion and loss of body moisture, allowing them to exploit a diverse range of dry and wet habitats.

Dumfries and Galloway is rich in habitats suitable for reptiles. They are found in heathland, grassland, moorland and coast

- in fact most semi-natural habitats that have an open and sunny aspect, vegetation providing cover for them to retreat into and suitable basking places. Some man-made habitats, such as railway lines, road embankments and gardens, can also provide valuable homes for some species too.

Breeding represents quite a challenge in our relatively cool climate. Most reptiles breed by laying eggs on or under the ground, using this latent heat to incubate them. Needless to say such a strategy is difficult in the UK, and nigh on impossible in most of Scotland. Hence the three common Scottish species have adapted to overcome this, and instead retain their eggs inside their body and effectively give birth to live young. Many are long-lived too, some surviving 15 years or more.



The common species

The **Adder** is probably the most familiar and recognisable species. The strong zig-zig markings along the body distinguish it from all other Scottish species. Males and females can be distinguished by their colour, with males typically being pale with strongly contrasting black markings and females being warmer brown with a chocolate-coloured zig-zag.

Adders are our only poisonous reptile, but like most UK reptiles they are rather timid creatures and will quickly retreat into the undergrowth when disturbed. Most bites happen when they are defending themselves, often in response to attempts to handle them. If you are lucky enough to find one, enjoy it, leave it alone and let it move away quietly of its own accord if it wishes to.

The other two species of terrestrial reptiles are lizards, although only one is recognisable as such. **Common Lizards** (sometimes known as Viviparous Lizards referring to its ability to bear live young) are widespread in D&G, and like to bask in sheltered spaces amongst tussocky vegetation. That rustle in the grass as you walk along a track - often this will be a lizard retreating for cover, having detected your presence long before you even noticed it.

Though snake-like in appearance, **Slow-worms** are in fact legless lizards. Unlike Adders, they rarely bask in the open, preferring instead to bask beneath objects such as stones, wood, bits of metal left lying out to find them. Their shiny grey-brown colour with little or no patterning is distinctive.

If caught or frightened, both Slow-worms and Common Lizards have the rather disconcerting ability to shed part of their tail. The detached tail continues wriggling, distracting the predator and allowing the animal to make its escape. Thankfully for the escapee the tail will in time re-grow.



Reptiles of the sea

Perhaps the most surprising reptile found in D&G is the **Leatherback Turtle**. Once considered to occur accidentally, its ecology is now better understood. It's a regular summer visitor to our shores, migrating across the Atlantic ocean to feed on the swarms of jellyfish along the west and north coasts. Growing up to 3m in length, these giant marine reptiles are rarely seen from land except when they occasionally strand on the beaches, often injured or dead. Sadly, propeller strikes from boats and marine litter are often contributing factors in turtle strandings.



Grass Snake ©northeastwildlife.co.uk

A new colonizer?

The rarest species of reptile found in Dumfries and Galloway is the **Grass Snake**. Widespread further south in England, it is a large species, reaching 4-5 feet in length and is distinguished by its olive green and black colour and distinctive yellow neck collar. It is

associated with damp habitats such as wet ditches and ponds, of which our region has a plentiful supply. Unlike our other terrestrial species, Grass Snakes lay eggs and require a warm habitat, such as a compost heap, to incubate them. With only three confirmed records so far in the region, it remains to be seen if this species spreads more widely, particularly if mean temperatures rise in the coming years.

Let us know if you see one...

All of our native reptile species are protected by law and being so shy and secretive their distribution is not fully understood. We are interested in all sightings of these species in D&G so please report details to DGERC if you see one.

Don't forget to support your local wildlife groups...

If you are interested in learning more about local wildlife, why not get involved in one of the many local wildlife groups around the region? Many groups organise walks, talks and events, and there are others with more specialist and practical interests too. They provide a great opportunity to learn more about different species, visit new sites and to meet people with like-minded interests. Here's a short list of just some of these (there are many others besides!) and their key contacts if you wish to find out more about their activities...

Butterfly Conservation D&G Sub-Group

Susan Woods 01387 730301

D&G Amphibian and Reptile Gp

www.dgarg.org.uk

Mark Pollitt 01387 760274

D&G Bat Group

www.dumfriesbatgroup.org.uk

Freda Seddon 01387 811580

Eastriggs Natural History Gp

Brian Hammond 01461 701096

Eskdale & L'dale Wildlife Club

Corrie Graham 01387 380036

Kirkmaiden Natural History Gp

www.kirkmaidennature.org

Rena Peebles 01776 840228

Lockerbie Wildlife Trust

www.lockerbie-wildlife-trust.co.uk

Jim Rae 07739 987009

Moffat & District Wildlife Club

www.moffatwildlife.co.uk

Iain Anderson 01683 220006

RSPB Galloway Local Group

www.rspb.org.uk/groups/galloway

Cynthia Douglas 01644 420605

SOC Stewartry Branch

Joan Howie 01644 430226

SOC Dumfries Branch

Pat Aberly 01556 630483

SOC West Galloway Branch

www.westgallowaysoc.org.uk

Geoff Sheppard 01776 870685

SWT Galloway Members Group

Graham Smith 01644 420881

Can you help by becoming a DGERC volunteer?

Are you interested in wildlife and have a little time to spare? DGERC are looking for volunteers willing to spare a few hours, either on a regular basis or just occasionally, to help with tasks such as entering wildlife records, assisting with mailings, helping at events and cataloguing digital photographs. Some of the tasks are computer based, and a reasonably good knowledge of computer software such as Excel is very useful. Most



work is at the DGERC office, although it may be possible to carry out some work such as data entry from your own home.

Other tasks such as mailings or events, only happen occasionally and its nice to have someone to call upon for a little assistance when we need it. If you think you might be able to help, please contact Mark Pollitt on 01387 760274 or email info@dgerc.org.uk.

Other news

New Mammal Atlas

Mammals remain critically under-recorded. To address this, The Mammal Society is compiling a National Mammal Atlas, the first in over 20 years. The atlas will provide a detailed, up-to-date picture of mammal distribution and abundance across the British Isles.

Records can be submitted directly to the County Mammal Recorder (Andy Riches), and The Mammal Society also has an online recording form on their website. Records submitted directly to DGERC will also be made available to contribute towards the atlas.

New atlas of Grasshoppers and Crickets

The Orthoptera Recording Scheme, in collaboration with the Biological Records Centre, is planning to publish a new Atlas of

Orthoptera and allied insects in 2013. DGERC will be providing all local records to contribute to the new national atlas. To learn how to identify some of our local species, join our Grasshopper ID day on Wednesday 22 August.

BSBI Excursion

This year BSBI are organising a week long field excursion to Kirkcudbrightshire. Botanists from all over the UK will be undertaking field visits to sites throughout VC73, helping to survey under-recorded areas and monitor some rare and scarce species. If you'd like to help to do some surveying and expand your botanical ID skills by joining the experts, contact David Hawker, Windywalls, Gatehouse of Fleet, Castle Douglas DG7 2DE 01557 814249 hawker398@btinternet.com

Woodland Heritage Seminar

Cree Valley Community Woodlands Trust (CVCWT) and the Community Woodlands Association (CWA) are holding a two-day seminar on Woodland Heritage at Newton Stewart on 7-8 June 2012. The seminar will give an introduction to the history and heritage of native woodland. The seminar focuses on Dumfries and Galloway but will be applicable to woods elsewhere. The event is free to CWA members and £25 for non-members. For further details contact CVCWT 01671 401423 or enquiries@cvcwt.org.uk.

Sharing wildlife data – a co-ordinated approach

In 2009, wildlife recording charity Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC) lodged a petition with the Scottish parliament urging the Scottish Government ‘to establish integrated local and national structures for collecting, analysing and sharing biological data to inform decision making processes to benefit biodiversity’. Many parts of Scotland do not have local records centres such as DGERC, and the ease of sharing and accessing biological information varies greatly from one area to another. The petition was signed by 726 people.

A key outcome of the Scottish Government’s response was to suggest a forum to bring together stakeholders from organisations throughout Scotland who are actively involved in the collection, management, sharing and use of species or habitat data. On 25 May 2012, a workshop will be held for all interested parties at Battleby, Perthshire. This will formally establish the new *Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum*, which will help to identify and tackle the challenges associated with sharing wildlife and habitat information throughout Scotland.

What will all this mean? Well, hopefully it will lead to greater recognition of the importance of good quality wildlife information as is provided by each of the Scottish local records centres. Such information is a must for those involved in decision making at local and national levels, and developing and improving mechanisms for collecting, sharing and distributing information throughout all parts of Scotland must surely be made a priority. If the Forum helps to highlight some of these issues and begins to steer the many different stakeholders in the same direction to help resolve them, hopefully we’ll begin to see some positive developments over the coming months and years.

BRISC conference comes to D&G...

Don’t miss a chance to meet fellow wildlife recorders from across Scotland at the Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC) Annual Conference in Dumfries on 27 October. DGERC are helping to organise the event, and details will be circulated via our email list in due course. Put the date in your diary now!

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