GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April 2008

David Palmar
(Newsletter Editor)

Next Newsletter Deadline
22 July 2008

GNHS is a Registered Scottish Charity Web-site:
http://www.gnhs.org.uk/

2008 Excursions — Anne Orchardson

Joint Weekend With Bute Natural History Society 26/27th April 2008
The opening event of this year's Excursion Programme is a weekend on Bute joining with the Bute Natural History Society. The details of the weekend are still being finalised, but it will consist of a mix of interest hosted by members of Bute NHS with Glyn Collis arranging the weekend. Participants may attend for one of the two days, or both days as they wish. If you want to attend both days and would like information on accommodation: http://www.isle-of-bute.com/

Ailsa Craig
Bernie Zonfrillo will lead two trips to Ailsa Craig: on Tuesday 20th May and Tuesday 15th July. Places are limited on these trips to 11 people for each, and the total cost per person is £22.50. A £5 deposit is payable with the completed booking form and the remaining £17.50 payable on the day (cash if possible). The boat will leave from Girvan - time to be confirmed later. This is an excellent opportunity to visit an island of great interest, so book your place soon to avoid disappointment! Due to the limited numbers please book on only one trip.

Booking forms to be sent to Anne Orchardson

Summer Social 2008 — Margaret Stead

The summer social this year will take the form of a dinner in Inchmurrin Hotel. We will be met by the Hotel's boat at 6.30pm on WEDNESDAY 11th June at the Jetty at Burnfoot. Take the A82 and head north past Balloch to the Arden roundabout.
Turn right there and follow the track labelled "Inchmurrin Island". Pass the public car park on your right and go straight on to the jetty, where the Hotel provides a secure compound in which to leave your car. Dinner will start at 7.30pm.

Menu
Carrot and Coriander Soup
Roast Silverside of Beef with Inchmurrin Whisky gravy
Chef's selection of fresh market vegetables and potatoes
Homemade Profiteroles with Butterscotch Sauce
Coffee and Chocolate Mints.

The total cost of dinner and transport to/from the Island will be £23.00 per person. If you would like to go, please make cheques out to GNHS and send them to me Margaret Stead at Camas Cottage, Gartocharn, Alexandria G83 8NL. Please let me know about any special dietary requirements by the 1st of June. You can phone me on 01389 830 378 or email to margaret.stead@btinternet.com.

Lothians Weekend, 14-15th June, 2008 **Bob Gray**

Over this weekend it is hoped to visit various estates and gardens in both East and Midlothian in order to view some of the outstanding trees in that area:

Prestonhall House. Major Henry Callander. Heritage Beech and Japanese Chestnut Oak (*Quercus acutissima*).
Newhailes House. NTS. Magnificent example of a managed landscape.
Inveresk Lodge Garden. NTS. Superb walnut. *Juglans*
Dalkeith Country Park. Duke of Buccleuch. Ancient oaks.
The Great Yew of Ormiston. Private ground. Has to be seen to be believed!
Carberry Tower. Church of Scotland. Fine Hungarian Oak and avenue of Giant Sequoias.

Accommodation: Premier Inn, Inveresk. £58 per room per night (may be shared).
Transport: Private cars. Arrive Friday evening. Return Sunday evening.
Contact: Bob Gray

Plean Country Park, 5th July 2008 **Edna Stewart**

Opposite the ruin of the big house, is a meadow with hundreds of Greater Butterfly Orchids and other wild flowers. We will try to count the orchids.
Meet at Milngavie Station at 9.30, to arrange lifts if needed. For directions for those who want to drive directly to Plean, phone Edna Stewart 587 7199.

A Handful of Namibian Trees **Junella McKay**

On a recent 13-day trip to the central part of Namibia I did not expect to be fascinated by the desert trees. It was the dry season, and there were many leafless twigs. But 'many' is perhaps not the correct word, for there were relatively few trees altogether along the miles and miles of desert scrub.

A surprise to me was the very large number of different shapes and sizes of the Acacias. Prior to this trip with my limited experience I had naively assumed that the flat-topped variety one sees in the Serengeti area of Tanzania was the only type. Amongst the Namibian varieties, we saw many Camel thorn acacias – *Acacia erioloba,* with their deadly thorns at well over one inch, which are an important part of the giraffe's diet; how do they manage to eat them? Despite the drought a few of these bushes were sporting new light green leaves. The leafless majority seemed to catch the sun which glinted off the base of their thorns, occasionally giving the impression of quite magical tiny white lights glowing all over the bushes. In hunting on the web for the scientific name of this variety I was charmed to come across a site on which a maker of guitars said he went to Africa for all his wood. The Camel thorn, he said, is deep red in colour, very heavy, bends extremely well, and is often used for bindings on his instruments.

Whilst in the area of the famous Sossusvlei sand dunes in the Namib Desert, one of our group returned from a wander bringing a fallen, green and only partially-grown fruit from the Inara tree *Acanthosicyos horrida*. Johan, our guide, explained that the ripe yellow fruit is much prized by the Topnar Nama people who live along the dry bed of the nearby Kuiseb River. Each family owns one of these trees, the deep roots of which can draw up water, and each tree is handed down to the eldest son. The ripe melons when harvested are chopped up, the seeds being discarded onto the sand to dry, after which they are harvested. Apparently they are much sort after in various Asian countries. The fruit is boiled with the top scum skimmed off and fed to their donkeys. The remainder is spread out to dry on boards or corrugated sheets, and then cut into strips, which are rolled up and stored to provide a ready portable snack which can keep for up to two years. Johan growled with feeling that when not accustomed to this food it can give violent diarrhoea!

A very strange-looking tree is the Kokerboom or 'Quiver' tree *Aloe dichotoma*. These spiky-looking plants are I understand one of four Namibian aloes to be classified as a tree and, as aloes, have solved the problem of water storage. The description 'quiver' is apparently because the San Bushmen of Namibia traditionally used the tree to make arrow quivers.

But the tree I found most impressive was the Mopane - *Colophospermum mopane* which grows everywhere in the west and north savannah and is responsible for providing much of the shade for animals - although it apparently has the habit of folding together its paired, hoof-like, leaves to save moisture. The Mopane sends its roots down deep and is probably the most efficient of all trees in the face of the drought. Even at the end of the dry season it was producing fresh green leaves, delightfully tinted with pink which, like the Camel thorn, seemed to glint in the sun as though they were wet, and looking very beautiful. At Twyfelfontein, one of the visitor centres, there was a written description of the uses for the Mopane - a list so fascinating that I would really like to share it with you.

"The versatile Mopane tree *Colophospermum mopane* is a key species supporting a multitude of dependants, including humans. The characteristic turpentine-smelling, cloven-hoof shaped leaves are rich in protein and phosphorus. They are full of bitter tannins when fresh, but palatable when dry and picked up by cattle, goats and game. They are also eaten by mopane worms and other insect larvae. The bark is used for making rope, the termite-resistant wood for fires, fences, huts, furniture, charcoal, carvings and utensils. The insect-resistant seeds are pressed to produce essential oils, ground up for talcum powder and made into beads. The resins in the bark are used for varnish and glue, and the bark and roots to tan leather. Parts of the tree are also used as remedies against indigestion, mouth sores, kidney stones, intestinal worms, eye inflammations and other diseases. The tree provides shade and shelter, and has an important social and religious role in ancestral offerings, cleansing rituals, ceremonial shelters and the sacred fire of Himba pastoralists in north western Namibia."

Next Newsletter - copy to David Palmar by 22nd July please.

Invading Moths **Neil Gregory**

Moths, like many species in years gone by, have spread across the UK by various means, natural and unnatural. Recently we have had new arrivals in Scotland and a couple more species are likely to come in the next few years. Four species come to our attention at this time:
Lithophane leautieri (Blair's Shoulder-knot)
Epiphyas postvittana (Light Brown Apple Moth)
Phyllonorycter leucographella (Firethorn Leaf Miner)
Cameraria ohridella (Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner)
I will give a brief description of each species.

Blair's Shoulder Knot
This macro moth is unusual in that the larvae feed on cypress, especially Lawson's cypress, and Leyland cypress. It is therefore common in urban areas. The first British sighting of this autumn-flying (October and November) moth was on the Isle of Wight in 1951 and it takes its name from entomologist Dr K G Blair, who spotted it. The moth was first seen in Scotland in 2000. Superficially it resembles a Dark or Grey Dagger (June and August flight) in that it is hairy, grey and with some small black, perhaps dagger-like markings on its wings. It has yet to be recorded in SW Scotland.

Light Brown Apple Moth
This species has an Australian origin was probably accidentally introduced into Cornwall in the 1930's. Although associated with orchards, in the UK it feeds polyphagously. It is a small *Tortrix* moth of brown colouration, lighter towards the head end. It flies between May and October. This has now been recorded in a few places locally, including Glasgow's Botanic Gardens, and should easily spread rapidly across many habitats.

Firethorn Leaf Miner
This moth was first discovered in Essex in 1989. It has spread northwards quickly, and is now common in urban areas throughout much of Britain. This very small moth feeds on various rosaceous bushes, but especially Firethorn (*Pyracantha*). It flies between April and October. It is a leaf miner and the larva lives inside a leaf making first a line of transparent upper epidermis that forms into a tent shape across the leaf's midrib. It is the only species on *Pyracantha* in this way and very easy to identify. Once established it will be present on most leaves in a bush and hundreds can readily be counted. Garden Centres may well be a cause for the distribution of this moth.

Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner
This species is of the most interest and perhaps concern. First discovered in Macedonia in 1985, it has spread across Europe rapidly. It was discovered near London in 2002. There can be many mines on a leaf and the miner can cause serious defoliation. The mines are between the side veins of the leaf. The moth is similar in size and nature to the Firethorn Leaf Miner. A recent paper by Gilbert *et al.* (2005) suggested that this moth would be in Scotland by 2007. It has moved across Europe at a much greater rate of expansion than any of the other species noted here. Having discovered the first examples in West Yorkshire in 2007 I now have a keen eye out for Horse Chestnuts in the area.

You can obtain more information from the internet, especially the following sites:
www.ukmoths.org.uk
www.leafmines.co.uk

Please do report any sightings of these 4 interesting new species.

Neil Gregory – Moth Recorder, Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire.

M. GILBERT *et al.* 2005 Forecasting *Cameraria ohridella* invasion dynamics in recently invaded countries: from validation to rediction, *Journal of Applied Ecology* 42: 805–813.

From the Reviews Editor **Bob Gray**

Book received in exchange for review in *The Glasgow Naturalist*

The World from Beginnings to 4000 BCE **Ian Tattersall**
Oxford University Press **2008** **Hardback £35.99**

This book is the first volume of the New Oxford World History, a series that provides a comprehensive treatment of "new world history" from various perspectives including, most obviously, chronology. The masterful text covers the period from "beginnings" (c.6.5 million years ago) to c.4000 BCE (i.e. 6000 years ago) and comprises what is essentially an up to date natural history of mankind starting with, in the first chapter, an analysis of the concept of evolutionary processes from a modern perspective. A list of useful websites relating to each chapter is a feature of this book. The author is a curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History and is an experienced field naturalist in the realms of human fossils and lemurs.

Concern for Swifts **Clare Darlaston**

Concern for Swifts (Scotland) was set up in 1997 due to recognition of the impact of building demolitions and renovation on the swift population. Concern for Swifts urgently needs some help – the suggestion below envisages a possible volunteer project for a student wanting to be involved with a real and accessible project relating to bird conservation.

Just before I had started thinking of establishing a project, a group of interested people in England – guided by Chris Mead, himself a great swift enthusiast - had set up a group which called itself "Concern for Swifts" - hence the name. After a while we became aware of other people – in Holland, in Germany, in France and later in Palestine who were also becoming increasingly aware of the loss of Swift colonies following city-centre redevelopment. The causal relationship is fairly obvious, and it is of interest that the impact was being noted across Europe and the Middle East at around the same time.

Since 1997 interest has grown in the project and in the decline in swift numbers – particularly in Scotland where BTO recorded a 62% decline between 1993 and 2003.

RSPB however, amalgamates all its records, so this alarming Scottish result has not triggered any response from the major conservation organisations.

In Glasgow the project is still being managed by one volunteer outwith working hours. The aims of the project are to survey and monitor the "swift priority areas" in the city and to work with property owners and developers towards the conservation of existing and the creation of new nest sites.

A reasonable survey base was carried out in 1999–2001, but not repeated systematically – although records for Glasgow and other areas have been kept as and when colonies have been seen. The original data was put on to a database along with any data from other areas.

One of the things that has not been attended to in the past four years is the entering of data onto the database – survey information for those years is in notes in exercise books, or survey forms sent in by others. The database is used to establish "swift priority areas" and so to guide conservation efforts to the most important areas. It will be built up into a national database and be accessible both in written form and electronically, most likely in ARC view.

Because of the perception that there is considerable loss of swift colonies in Glasgow two things are now urgent as far as survey is concerned – one is to complete the input of data into the existing data base; the other is to do as much survey in the coming season as possible.

Volunteer effort in this direction could either concentrate on the collection of data and/or focus on managing a survey to be carried out by members of local conservation organisations, city council rangers and members of the public. Both could be rewarding and useful on a CV – the first to give experience of swift ecology and nesting requirements; the second to give experience of managing survey work and of managing data.

Swift survey is carried out between June and mid-August with July being the best time. I should assume that the time required to bring the database up to date would be 3-4 full days, with the possibility of longer if records from RSPB or from other areas were to be included. Managing the survey and/or carrying out survey work could take anything up to three months full time.

The level of involvement would clearly depend on the availability of someone with an interest in the topic of urban species and their conservation. This would be a good opportunity for a student to gain experience in managing data for a real, local and existing project which will make a real difference to the conservation of swift nest sites and hence swift colonies in Scotland.

Contact
Clare Darlaston
see www.concernforswifts.com