

Recorder's Conference, Saturday 24 March 2012

By Natalie Harmsworth

The Wildlife Information Centre's (TWIC) Spring Recorders' Conference took place in the Scottish Borders Council Chambers in Newtown St Boswells on Saturday 24th March. The day provided an opportunity to hear a range of talks on the theme of recording in woodlands. Presentations were given by individuals representing Borders Forest Trust, Fungi Group of South East Scotland, Lothian & Borders Badger Group, the British Bryological Society and Red Squirrels in South Scotland.

Anna Craigen, Borders Forest Trust (BFT), spoke first. Anna started working for BFT in 2002. Much of her work is focussed on working with young people and local communities - sparking their interest in the natural world as she shares her enthusiasm for wildlife and the environment. Her presentation focused on some of the projects that BFT are currently involved in, including woodland habitat projects like Carrifran Wildwood. Anna highlighted the value of volunteers and the need for long-term monitoring on sites undergoing habitat restoration. Recording on such sites is vital if we are to understand how specific management actions affect biodiversity. To find out about ways to volunteer with BFT visit their website

www.bordersforesttrust.org. Anna would be interested in receiving photographs that people have taken on BFT sites for use in publications etc. Email anna@bordersforesttrust.org.



Neville Kilkenny of the Fungus Group of South East Scotland (FGSES) described some of the challenges involved in recording fungi and outlined the support available for anyone thinking about becoming involved in recording this group. Some of these challenges would have been familiar to people recording other groups. A live demonstration of the Scottish Fungi website followed, with particular reference to the online data entry feature that feeds into the British Mycological Society (BMS) database. This is one of two UK databases for fungi. The other database is hosted by the Association of British Fungus Groups. In the fast moving world of taxonomy, it is vital when recording fungi to state the literature used for identification purposes. The BMS database is therefore preferred as it retains the original name that the recorder gave the fungus with its literature reference. This allows the record to be interpreted correctly in the future if taxonomic changes occur. To find out about recording fungi and other useful resources visit the Scottish Fungi website

<http://sites.google.com/site/scottishfungi/>. The site also contains a link to FGSES.

The presentation of the **Bob Saville award** followed. This award is presented each year to someone who has made an extra-ordinary contribution to recording in our area. It is awarded in memory of the late Bob Saville, someone who did so much for TWIC as well as recording. Douglas McKean made the presentation and the recipient was Jackie Muscott. Jackie is a respected botanist and botanical recorder for West Lothian. She has been involved in the Wildlife Sites system since the 1980s and does a lot of voluntary work with local groups. Records submitted to TWIC date back to the late 1970s. To date she has submitted around 70,000 records covering 20 species groups, a truly phenomenal effort!

Before lunch, there was an 'Open Mike' session, which allowed participants to advertise their projects and events. **Chris Sydes** from the Lothian and Borders Mammal Group (LaBMaG) talked about the 2012 Mammal Society Hedgehog Monitoring project, which has been greatly 'slimmed down' this year. Please email chris.sydes@tiscali.co.uk for details and to sign up.

Natalie Harmsworth, Ecologist at TWIC promoted the 2012 recording excursion programme and encouraged as many people to attend as possible. These events are aimed at existing and budding recorders and cover sites across the Lothians and Borders. Excursions this year will focus on Local Biodiversity Sites. Before a site can be assessed as LBS an up-to-date plant list and other species records are needed. A full list of excursions can be downloaded from the Recording Events page of the TWIC website

www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/recording_events/.

Finally, **Graeme Wilson**, TWIC Centre Manager, announced that TWIC are seeking a wider membership and outlined the various benefits associated with becoming a member of TWIC. Individuals and organisations can become members and the membership fee is currently set at £5. For further information, including a membership form, please visit the Get Involved section of the TWIC website

www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/involved/.

Over lunch delegates were able to view the various displays and posters, and have a go at the woodland themed quiz. The Borders Recorder Group also met during the interval.

After lunch, **Chris Sydes** from the Lothian & Borders Badger Group (LBBG) spoke on the topic of badger recording. Sadly, illegal badger-baiting activity remains a threat to badgers in the Lothians and Borders, as in other parts of the UK. Legal protection is therefore aimed at safeguarding badger welfare rather than species conservation. Chris indicated that badger recording varies markedly between Local Authority areas; the coverage is fairly complete for Midlothian and Edinburgh, while recording in the Borders is still in its infancy. Through a series of photographs, Chris outlined the badger signs and tracks that indicate that badgers have been in the area. His presentation also included a captivating video of a family of badgers, which he had recorded himself. Chris' badger videos are available to view on YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/user/csydes>, while his photographs of badger tracks and signs can be viewed on his aptly named website 'How to Read Badger' <https://sites.google.com/site/howtoreadbadger1/>.



David Long, British Bryological Society (BBS), spoke on the topic of woodland bryophytes. The bryophytes comprise the liverworts, hornworts and mosses. With over 1000 species, Britain is rich in bryophytes. David gave an overview of the life cycle of bryophytes, using specific species as illustration; described the reasons why bryophytes are important in the context of woodlands (for example for nutrient cycling and as indicators of air quality); and highlighted some of the most bryophyte-rich habitats present in Scotland and the Scottish Borders. The Oceanic Woodlands on the west coast of the Highlands have been dubbed "Atlantic rainforests" due to their terrific diversity. Bryophytes are an important and conspicuous component of such woodlands. David finished his presentation by describing the essentials of bryophyte recording, emphasising the need to record location information accurately using a GPS. He also called for further action for bryophyte conservation.

The British Bryological Society website, <http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/bbs/bbs.htm>, contains useful information on recording bryophytes, including an online Field Guide and details of forthcoming field meetings. Details of how to become a member of BBS are also available on the website. There is also an active Bryophyte

Group in Edinburgh, which covers the SE Scotland region. Please contact David Chamberlain, d.chamberlain@rbge.org.uk, or Liz Kungu, e.kungu@rbge.org.uk for further information on the local group.

Karen Ramoo, Red Squirrels in South Scotland (RSSS), provided an interesting talk on the RSSS project and the Importance of Data Collation. The Grey Squirrel was introduced to Britain from North America in the 19th Century and has since displaced the native Red Squirrel by disease and competition for food in much of the country. Grey Squirrels carry the parapox disease, which is deadly to the native Red Squirrel (the Greys show no ill effects of the virus). Karen described the main incursion routes used by Grey Squirrels to move into South Scotland, and through a series of maps indicated the instances of seropositive Grey Squirrels and pox outbreaks in Red Squirrels. Karen went on to talk about the measures being implemented to try to prevent further northwards expansion of the greys, including the trap loan scheme, and touched on new novel approaches to controlling the spread that may be used in the future. The RSSS and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) projects will soon merge, providing a more coordinated approach to Grey Squirrel control. Please visit the RSSS website for further information www.red-squirrels.org.uk/.



Graeme Wilson, TWIC Manager, announced the winners of the quiz (Neville Kilkenny and Reuben Singleton) and summed up the day. Graeme touched on facts from the talks that were particularly interesting or memorable, for example the badgers that 'remembered' where the edge of the woodland used to be and the fact that mowing your lawn will encourage moss growth by generating new propagules (the perfect excuse for not mowing your lawn as frequently!).

All in all, the Conference was an enjoyable and interesting event. The next Conference will be in the autumn of 2012 at a venue in the Lothians and the plan is to host TWIC's AGM at that meeting.