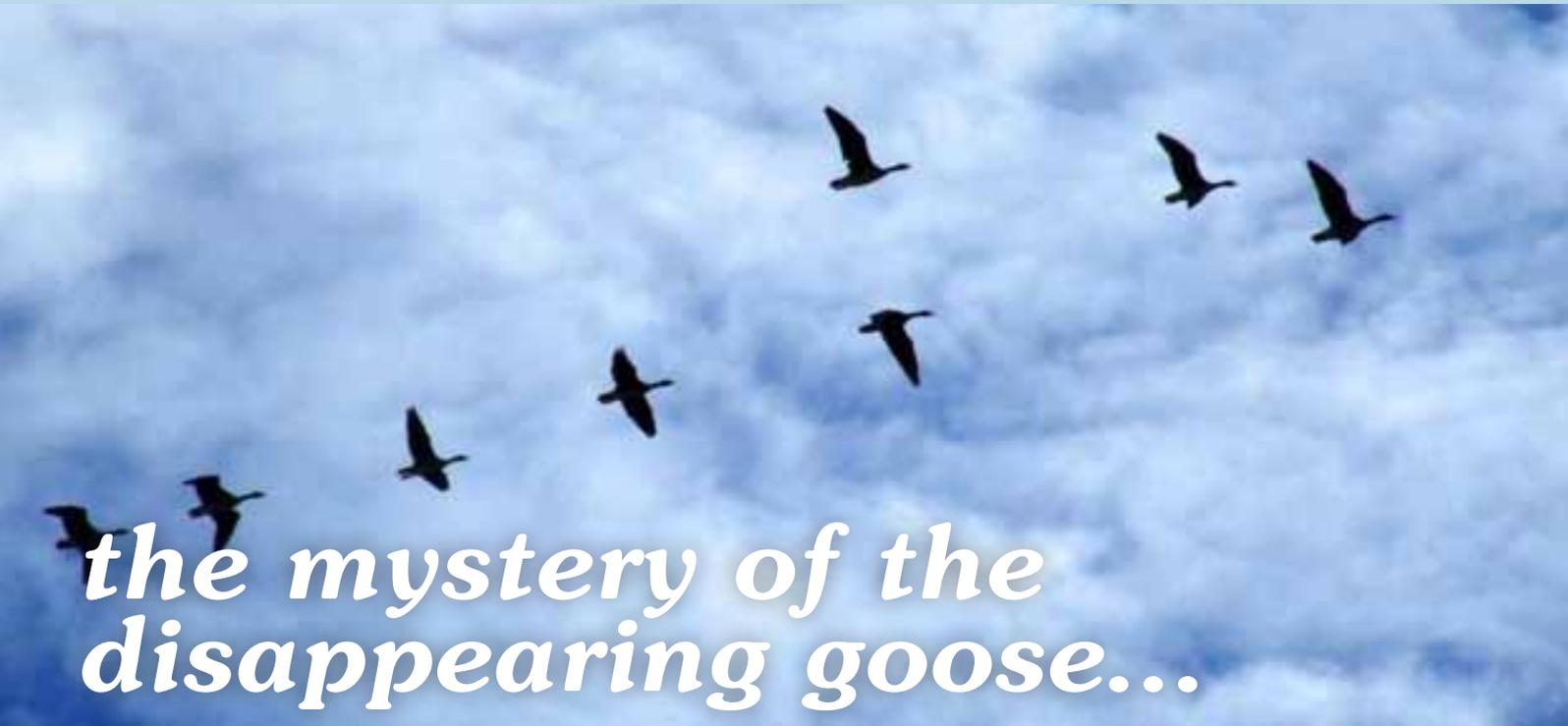


life

issue 14 • winter 2012

2012's soggy weather has certainly dampened the spirits of some of our local wildlife. However, it's not stopped people getting out and about to discover, enjoy and protect our fantastic local biodiversity...



the mystery of the disappearing goose...

Every September, over 250 bean geese brave an arduous journey south to their winter home on the Slamannan Plateau. And every February they leave! But where do they go?

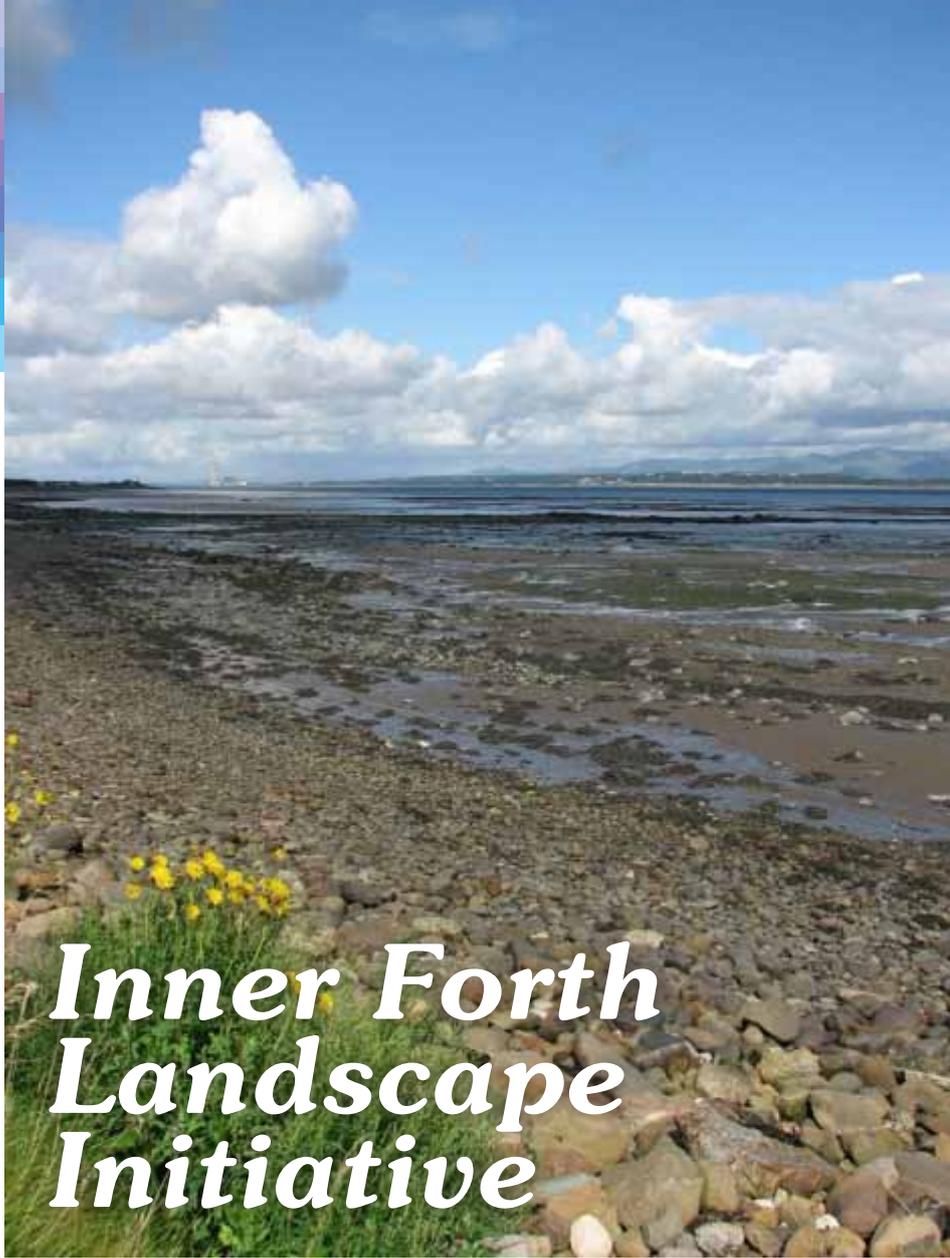
Work to discover the migration routes of these rare geese started in 2011 when 15 bean geese were caught and ringed. The tale of the birds' dramatic migration began to unfold. Seven of the geese were spotted near Oslo in March 2012. They rested there for a while before moving on to their breeding grounds elsewhere in Scandinavia. But the route they took and where they went next remained a mystery.

Further work this winter aims to solve the mystery of the disappearing bean geese and finally reveal exactly where they go during their epic migration. In October 2012 four bean geese were caught, ringed and fitted with hi-tech satellite tracking collars. The lightweight collars provide regular data on the birds' exact locations, allowing them to be tracked throughout their migration to Scandinavia.

The overall population of bean geese has declined by up to a third in the past 15 years. However, the Slamannan flock has seen a big increase over that time. Discovering more about the movements and

habits of this important flock is essential for its future conservation. The Bean Goose Action Group with The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust is undertaking this fascinating tracking project to help them to better understand the threats facing Scotland's only wintering flock of bean geese.

As part of the project local primary schools in Slamannan and Greengairs are learning more about the geese and the science of tracking them. They also hope to make links with schools in Scandinavia once we know where the geese breed.



Inner Forth Landscape Initiative

A pioneering project to enhance the landscape and celebrate the history of the Inner Forth has taken a step closer to securing a major funding boost.

In July the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative successfully passed the first round of the Heritage Lottery's Landscape Partnership funding programme, taking a significant step closer to securing an ear-marked £1,975,900. As part of this process the partnership has been awarded a 1 year development grant of £75,900 and is now busy developing a wide range of local projects to deliver from 2014 onwards.

The Inner Forth Landscape Initiative aims to reveal the hidden cultural, historical and natural wealth of the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth, restore and conserve important

features, open up access, and ultimately leave a legacy of a richer landscape and new facilities for all. It aims to:

- turn perceptions of the Inner Forth around and rekindle local pride in the place,
- connect disparate habitats to create a landscape flourishing with wildlife,
- celebrate, protect and improve access to important historical and natural features,
- support committed and motivated local community groups, individuals and organisations to take action to conserve and celebrate their area's heritage,
- increase access to and knowledge of the area's important heritage, and
- provide training opportunities for people in local heritage skills.

The Inner Forth is an area of real conservation and historic importance. It is an internationally important site for wintering birds and supports important habitats such as saline lagoons, rich mudflats, peat bogs and ancient woodlands. The landscape has also been home to Scotland's industries for centuries. The initiative plans to work with local communities to take action to protect and celebrate this fascinating and valuable cultural and natural heritage.

“Celebrate the history of the Inner Forth”

Between now and the end of October 2013, the team will be working with local partners, community groups and individuals to come up with a suite of projects to conserve, enhance and celebrate the landscape around the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth.

Over the next few months the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative team will be organising events where interested local residents and community groups can come to meet the project team and discuss project ideas. These will be widely advertised, so please keep a look out.

The Inner Forth Landscape Initiative is a real team effort. The partnership sees local government, charities, and agencies working together with local people and communities to deliver vital conservation work on a large scale.

For more information

e-mail the Inner Forth Project Team on: innerforth@rspb.org.uk

visit: <http://innerforthlandscape.wordpress.com/>

or phone Kate Fuller, Community Engagement & Projects Officer, Tel: 07860 592 061

Carron Dams

Tucked away on the edge of Stenhousemuir, Carron Dams offers a haven to local wildlife and people alike. The site, once a system of dams supplying water to the bustling Carron Ironworks, is now a peaceful wild area rich in plants and animals. The site supports a range of wetland and fen, deciduous woodland, and brownfield habitats. As one of the largest wetlands in the area, much of the site is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Carron Dam and neighbouring Forge Dam are home to some particularly rare animals including the Hobo spider, the water rail and maybe even the elusive water vole.

Over recent years the Scottish Wildlife Trust, assisted by Central Scotland Forest Trust and Falkirk Council have been actively managing the site to improve access and manage the woodland and wetland habitats. In addition Buglife have undertaken a programme of surveying and



habitat management to protect and safeguard the Forge Dam.

Meanwhile, the neighbouring Larbert High School has embraced the opportunities that the site offers for education and pupil involvement. With its mix of natural and cultural heritage Carron Dams is an ideal place to explore and learn about science, geography, history, art, design and technology, and so much more. It's also a fantastic openspace for activities such as orienteering. In May, around 300 first year pupils met experts at the site for an introduction to some of its amazing wildlife. Pupils have now formed a junior management group to help in the care and improvement of the site.



The Carron Dams site has recently been earmarked as a possible new Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The site would make an ideal LNR because of the rich biodiversity, accessibility, and potential for local involvement and education opportunities. A local management group is being developed to help establish the LNR and oversee its future care and use.

Marine Mammal Rescue

In recent years the ranger service has been called out to help locate stranded cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in the Forth Estuary. This year there have been several strandings, many in the Falkirk area. They have included several Harbour Porpoises, Bottlenose Dolphins and a rare Beaked Whale.

The underlying causes of strandings and whether they are caused by human activity or are a natural occurrence is not clear. Post mortems carried out on the beached Harbour porpoises and dolphins have shown that most of them had empty stomachs and damage to their lungs and bodies, apparently caused by beaching. Maybe these particular animals were chasing food when they became stranded. Other strandings have been investigated and many of the animals are old, very thin or have some physical trauma. It still remains to be seen why apparently healthy animals are found beached.

Recently, 22 Pilot whales died when they became beached on the Fife coast. Autopsies revealed that these sociable whales appeared to be in a healthy condition. It is unclear why these animals beached themselves. One theory is that the pod followed a whale that was old, sick or panicked.

Other reasons for mass strandings are linked to low and mid frequency ship sonar which can travel hundreds of miles underneath the sea and is very loud to cetaceans. Sonar can affect whales' navigation systems causing them to lose their bearings and stray into shallow water. Whale strandings associated with sonar are identified after death by physical symptoms including bleeding in the animal's brain, ears and internal tissues; in humans this would be "the bends" that divers develop when they surface too quickly. It is thought that sonar could affect the cetaceans dive patterns and hearing.

Whatever the cause of these strandings it is important to act quickly in order to save the animal. The longer the animal is out of the water bearing its own weight the smaller the chance of survival.

You can help:

If you find a dead, stranded marine animal, please call 01463 243030 or email stranding@sac.co.uk

Rescue for live strandings can be called 24hours a day through

Scottish SPCA Animal helpline 03000 999 999 or British Divers Marine Life Rescue 01825 765546

Year of Natural Scotland 2013

2013 has been declared the Year of Natural Scotland. Year of Natural Scotland 2013 is a chance to highlight Scotland's great natural assets. It provides an opportunity to celebrate our reputation as a land of stunning natural beauty and biodiversity, and promote ways in which residents and visitors can enjoy our beautiful landscapes, wildlife and heritage. Look out for Year of Natural Scotland activities and events near you throughout 2013. Visit visitscotland.com/natural

Year of Natural Scotland 2013



Moth nights

During 2012 Falkirk Council organised two moth nights. The events introduced people to the fascinating world of nocturnal moths and helped to identify some of the species found in the Falkirk area. In total 37 moth species were identified.

What's On

Watch out for the Falkirk Outdoor Diary 2013. Out soon, with lots of activities, events, walks & talks on offer.

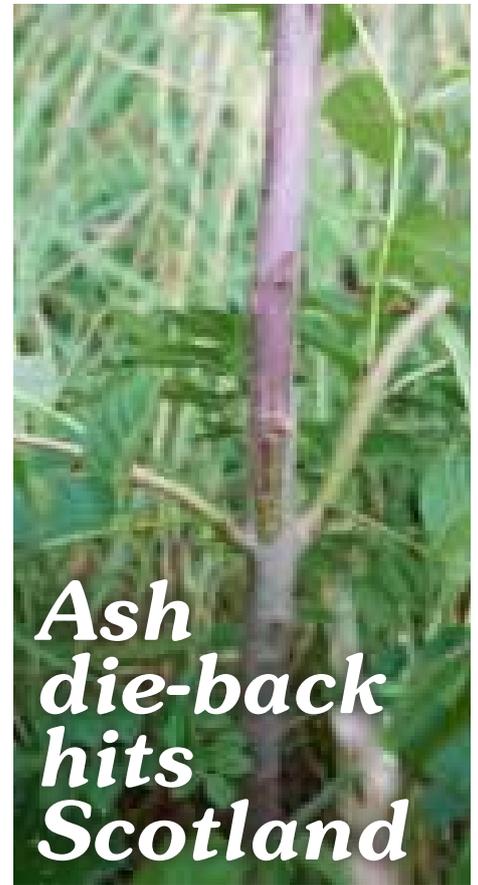


Sparrow food

A group of local volunteers, supported by Falkirk Council's Ranger Service, are creating a tree sparrow winter feeding station near Bo'ness. Tree sparrows have declined dramatically in number across the UK, partly due to the loss of winter feeding areas (e.g. stubble fields). Providing bird feed during the winter in areas used by tree sparrows can make a real difference to their survival. Hopefully this, along with habitat improvements and tree sparrow nest boxes, will help protect our local tree sparrows.

Tough winters take toll

The winters of 2009 and 2010 were tough and not just for people. Recent monitoring of barn owl boxes across Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Perth & Kinross and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park showed the number of breeding barn owls had plummeted in 2012. Of 135 nest boxes that had previously been used by barn owls just 27 were successfully used in 2012. That's just 20%! During particularly harsh winters fewer owls will survive. This is made worse by lying snow which conceals the owls' small mammal prey. Fingers (and claws) crossed for a mild winter and plenty of voles to eat in 2013!



Ash die-back hits Scotland

Chalara dieback of ash is a serious disease of ash trees caused by a fungus called *Chalara fraxinea*. The disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees, and usually leads to tree death. In February 2012 it was found in a consignment of infected trees sent from the Netherlands to a nursery in Buckinghamshire. The disease has now been identified at over 200 sites across the UK, including 11 in Scotland.

Britain's population of 80 million ash trees provides shelter and food for a wide range of wildlife. The tree's loosely-branched structure means plenty of light reaches the woodland floor, allowing a variety of plants to grow beneath them. This disease could have a catastrophic impact on a tree species that plays an important role in our landscape, culture and ecology.

For a guide to identifying the disease and to report suspected cases see www.forestry.gov.uk

Get in touch...

To find out more about biodiversity action in this area contact:

The Biodiversity Officer,
Abbotsford House,
David's Loan, Falkirk FK2 7YZ.
Tel: 01324 504863
E-mail: biodiversity@falkirk.gov.uk

If you have any news, articles, events or ideas for the next Biodiversity Newsletter please send them to the Biodiversity Officer by 30/4/13.

Images courtesy of:
Falkirk Council; S Paterson, RSPB;
CATCA; David Jones; Fera.



Falkirk Council