



Natural Heritage Programme

BCT's three-year Natural Heritage Programme funded by Scottish Natural Heritage has nearly come to an end and several important parts of the work have finished recently. Brief accounts of some of this work is given in the paragraphs below – full versions of the documents referred to can be seen or obtained at the BCT office. There are some parts of the work that are still continuing – most notably work to safeguard the small populations of Water Voles – Birse's most threatened mammal – and also work involving everyone in developing a Biodiversity Action Plan for the parish.

Breeding Wader Survey Finzean and Forest of Birse



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Two wading bird species; lapwing and oystercatcher are some of the most familiar birds to everyone who lives in Birse. The lapwing population has been in decline throughout the UK for several years and local observations suggested that both it and oystercatchers were declining in Birse. Dr Alastair Pout examined the situation in the enclosed land of Finzean and the Forest of Birse (Ballochan) during 2006 where he found 60 pairs of breeding lapwings and 37 pairs of Oystercatchers. The breeding success of both species was higher in Ballochan than Finzean and it seemed likely that the number of young Lapwing being fledged in Finzean was not sufficient to maintain the population. Significant mortality of lapwing chicks occurs on their journey from tilled land (where many nest) to grassland where they stay until fledged. In his report Dr Pout, suggest means by which this journey might be made less hazardous and hence ensure the survival of lapwings as a breeding species in Finzean.



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The Flora of Track and Roadside Verges

The verges of tracks and roads in the farm land of Birse provide a network of semi-natural grassland which is a refuge for many plants and a habitat for invertebrates, birds and small mammals. The verges also have a high amenity and aesthetic value and there are several places where they greatly enhance the views of the dramatic landscapes. Kath Richards undertook a survey for BCT of 18 verges in the low ground of Finzean to find those with the greatest number of plant species and make suggestions as to how the biodiversity of all of them could be maintained or enhanced. Of the 18 recorded, four she thought were "very diverse" and five were "species poor". Factors associated with high diversity included sympathetic cutting regimes – (especially delaying it until late August or September after flowering) , lack of herbicide use (and drift from fields), and low intensity of grazing.



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Slewdrum Fungus Survey

Fungi are a very significant but often over-looked element in the biodiversity of a wood and so BCT asked Dr Liz Holden a nationally recognised fungi specialist who lives near Braemar to undertake a preliminary or "scoping" survey of Slewdrum's "Macrofungi" (that is fungi with reproductive structures visible to the naked eye). In three days in October, 158 species were found and the report makes recommendations about future management both to safeguard the fungi and also to utilise the ability of some of them to help trees establish and grow more quickly. Several of the fungi found were rare or of limited distribution in Scotland. As expected, the long-established broadleaves near the Dee had several uncommon species. One of most interesting of these was the rarely recorded "Willow Glue fungus" (*Hymenochaete tabacina*), which is known from only five other Scottish sites.



A "Mycelial pad" of the Willow Glue fungus *H. tabacina* binding willow branches together in Slewdrum Forest.
Photo © E. Holden

Junior Bird-recorders

As part of the wildlife audit project, the Under-5's Group which meets weekly in Finzean Hall have been given a bird table which they can view from the hall. They have also been given stickers of common wild birds and a board on to which they can show the birds that they see. The table was designed and made by Doug Gray, seen below with the Group



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