



THE HARRIER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

NO. 25 – Winter 04

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The Sam Penney Memorial Lecture 4th February 2004

Each year the club marks Sam Penney's memory by a prestigious lecture, usually given by a leading wildlife photographer. In recent years, the Sam Penney Memorial Lecture has been given by Dutch, Irish, Scottish and English photographer/lecturers and on every occasion members have been delighted with an outstanding talk illustrated by superb pictures. This short article is intended to persuade those members who have previously missed this annual treat not to let it happen this season. I'll kick-off with a few background details about Sam. He was a very

old friend and an inspiration to Ivor Mc Donald and me when as schoolboy birdwatchers we would sometimes experience problems in bird identification. Sam was always there to help giving generously of his time, not just to us but also to anybody requesting his aid. He had a lifelong interest in Northern Ireland's birds and in particular the birds of Lough Neagh. He was the first person I ever heard voicing concern about the loss of important habitats here; a problem he recognised, very early on and which led to surveys of species all over the Province. Sam gave strong support to the young members of our Club, in the 1960s, when a series of important winter and summer wildfowl surveys were carried out on Lough Neagh. I'm proud to say he became the club's first President and I believe it is true to say that the NIOC was the only organisation in this country to honour his place in Irish ornithology. Sam always loved "a good talk on birds with plenty of good slides" so when the club was considering the most appropriate manner in which to celebrate his memory, the proposal of a prestigious memorial lecture was adopted unanimously.

This year's lecture, "The Magic of the Celtic Islands", will be given by Tony Hamblin. Club members will recall Tony's excellent lecture "Upland Birds" in 2001 and will know that we are in for a visual

treat coupled with a commentary delivered in an easy and amusing style. Readers of the wildlife magazines will be aware of his work and he has bagged the British Birds *Bird Photographer of the Year* award on more than one occasion. As well as being a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, his services as a judge are regularly in demand in photographic clubs in Great Britain. I can predict, with great confidence that this year's talk, which takes us on a wildlife tour of the Welsh Islands, the Hebrides and Shetland, will provide an entertaining ninety minutes and his beautiful pictures will light up our dark winter evening.

Come and enjoy Tony's talk and see how a top bird photographer does it.

Tom Ennis

N.B

Please note that this is a change to the advertised programme. The Sam Penney Memorial Lecture was to have been given by Dave Cotteridge but he is unable to attend due to business commitments.

The Breeding Bird Survey in Northern Ireland, 2004

If you are interested in making your bird watching count and can spare 5-6 hours



of fieldwork each spring, we are looking for volunteers to take part in the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in Northern Ireland. We achieved excellent coverage in 2003, with more than 100 BBS squares being surveyed in the province; the highest number since the scheme started in 1994. This will enable us to continue to keep track of changes in the breeding numbers of more than 20 common and widespread species in Northern Ireland. However, coverage remains sparse in some counties and by increasing the number of sites surveyed, we will be able to monitor the numbers of more species.

For the first time in the survey's history, observers can now enter their BBS bird counts electronically via the web using the new BBS-Online application, <http://www.bto.org/bbs>. As well as providing data entry facilities, the system also allows the user to view counts from previous years, giving the observer a picture of how the numbers of each species have changed on their site. In addition to BBS-Online, the new BBS web pages (available to everyone) provide a wealth of information and results from the scheme, including species distribution maps, population trends and species lists for your region or county. If you do not have internet facilities, do not be put off, all bird counts can still be submitted on the usual paper forms and you will

receive a free copy of the BBS report each year. A free lowland bird song cassette is also available to all new volunteers taking part in the scheme, and for those taking on a upland square, a second upland bird song cassette is also supplied.

If you are interested in taking part in the BBS, please contact Mike Raven at the BTO (01842-750050) or email bbs@bto.org or log onto www.bto.org/bbs.

Copeland e-news

The Copeland Bird Observatory is to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2004.

We are a vibrant organisation, studying both migration and breeding birds (especially seabirds) by careful and systematic recording and by ringing on the 40 acre Lighthouse Island just four miles offshore from Donaghadee in County Down. Sea watching from two hides can be good and cetaceans are often seen. A major effort at vegetation management is made annually to provide the right conditions for the very successful Manx Shearwater colony, which has now reached 3000 pairs. Much scrub creation has provided excellent conditions for migrating insectivorous birds. Enthusiastic volunteers do all the work. Other special birds of Copeland include Storm Petrel (non-breeding), Black Guillemot, Eider, Water Rail, Moorhen and Stock Dove. All four big gulls breed on the Island, but their numbers are declining and we are working to attract terns to breed again after many years absence.

Members usually visit the Island on most weekends from spring to late autumn and there are both week-long and day visits. There

are superb opportunities for birding, photography and general wildlife watching.

Now that news dissemination has become so easy using e-mails and websites, the Observatory has established an excellent website which is continually expanding and is regularly updated. Its address is <http://www.cbo.org.uk/>. Members and other interested friends are also able to receive regular news of sightings, ringing and other activities and events by e-mail. This is a free service and NIOC members would be very welcome to register for the CBO e-news. Simply send an e-mail to: neville.mckee@btinternet.com entitled "CBO e-news please". If you later decide that you want to discontinue, it is just as easy to de-register. If you'd like to try a visit to the Island, I am also the contact to arrange boats and accommodation.

Neville McKee



Copeland Bird Observatory

Members' Night

On 3 December last year 24 of our members and their partners joined us at The Island Civic Centre in Lisburn for the annual club Members' Night. It was generally agreed to have been a very successful and enjoyable evening.

Following the welcome and introductions the audience watched the RSPB film *Pinkfeet*. There was then something of a change of mood when a short film from the *Creature Comforts* series by the marvellous Nick Park and Aardman Studios (the creators of *Wallace & Grommit*) was shown. Once the laughter had subsided we got down to serious business with the *Birdbrain of the Year Quiz* when five teams of three struggled with 30 'birdy' questions from the fields of film, literature and poetry, the Bible etc. That brought us up to the finger buffet which offered the opportunity to relax and have a chat over the food and wine. The tension then rose while the quiz was marked and, in what by then was an absolutely electric atmosphere (well, you can imagine) the winning team made of Shirley Gray, Margaret Stinson and Des Price with 21 points was announced.

Of course points mean prizes and wonderfully tasteful rewards, in the form of chocolate 'Doo Doo's', were presented to the victors by the Chairman. To tempt us to the upcoming *Dinobirds* exhibition of feathered fossils from China at The Ulster Museum (opens on 30 January), Robert Nash showed a special video about the exhibition, and then there was a further chance to chat and relax before the evening ended.

This is the second Members' Night

we have held in The Island Civic Centre and, based upon the positive feedback received, the committee is certainly minded to repeat the venture. Our hope is that even more members will attend in 2004 so you might want to make a note now in your shiny new diaries. The date will be announced in the 2004/05 programme.

Dave Craig
Chairman



'Birdbrains of the Year Left to Right: Shirley Gray, Des Price, and Margaret Stinson'

NIOC at Animal Magic (A big Thank You!)

Last year, the club took a stand at *Animal Magic* at WWT Castle Espie. The event was held on 28th & 29th June and, over the weekend, our volunteers had the opportunity to speak to some of the nearly 5,000 visitors about the club and its activities - and to raise funds for the club via the sale of books, magazines and optical equipment, generously donated by members. Thanks are owing to Joy

Scott, Geraldine McErlane, Sandy McWilliams, Jim Megarry, Jimmy Whitla, and Des Purcell for giving up their free time to man the stand.

Dave Craig

Help Needed

For years now, Jackie Grant has produced *The Harrier*, a job she took over from her father, the late Ken Brown. Unfortunately increasing domestic and work commitments mean that Jackie is to bow out after this issue of the newsletter. The committee wish to thank Jackie for her work in producing the publication over the years and, looking ahead, to ask if any of our members would be willing to step into the breach. We, and I am certain you, want to ensure the continuation of *The Harrier* - so can you help us in any way? If you think you may be able to be of assistance please contact me, without commitment, on (028) 9266 1162 or at dave.craig@btopenworld.com to discuss.

Dave Craig

HONORARY
SECRETARY'S REPORT for
2003
(Presented at the 2004 AGM
on 21st January)

Over the past year with the exception of July, the Committee met on a monthly basis at Castle Espie Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre outside Comber. Once again, special thanks are due to James Orr and the WWT for facilitating us. Thanks also to the Ulster Museum and in particular to Robert Nash for providing the venue for our winter programme of events.

“The Work of Northern Ireland Bird Photographers No 30” photographic show took place in March as usual, attracting 17 entries. As always, the Club would like to have more members participating in this event. Unfortunately, the show still has no sponsor and had to be financed once again by the Club. A search is still ongoing to attract a sponsor for this event. A friend of Stanley McIlreavey of Victoria Cameras provided the 10” X 8” prints for the photographic display board. This enabled the Club to take the display to various public centres and our thanks go to both of them for their support. The photographic display again formed the backdrop to the Club’s stand at the Castle Espie “Animal Magic” weekend in June.

Jackie Grant who for a number of years has produced our Club newsletter **“The Harrier”** stands down from production this month. The Club owes grateful thanks to Jackie for all her hard work and dedication over the years. Therefore, if any member can offer their assistance in compiling and

producing **“The Harrier”** please contact the Chairman or any member of the Committee. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank Maurice Hughes for his work on the Club website. It is most impressive and well worth a visit at www.nioc.fsnet.co.uk.

I would like to record my appreciation to our advertisers whose support makes the production of our programme possible. Members are asked to mention the club when purchasing goods or services from them.

At this point, on behalf of the Club I wish to thank the following for their donations: -

- N.I.E.: £212;
- Derry City Council: £208.98;
- The Honourable Irish Society: £370
- Bird Watching Magazine: £54.47 for the purchase of a nest box, bird table and seed to be erected at the N.I.Hospice, Somerton Road, Belfast.

The Chairman and Committee have given much time and attention to the running of the Club with a programme of varied and interesting lectures and field trips throughout the year. Club lectures and field trips continue to receive varying attendances and it would be pleasing to see more members making use of their membership by coming along to both.

The February and November field trips to Dumfries and Galloway were well attended but others less so.

December once again saw the return of our **“Members Night”** held at the Lisburn Civic Centre. This was a social evening when 24 members and guests enjoyed a quiz, a video, food, conversation and beverages! However, it would have been even better to have shared the enjoyable evening with more of our members.

Finally, I wish to thank those members who have taken part in Club activities or helped in any way over the past year and I continue to welcome your comments and feed back on any aspect of the Club.

JIM MEGARRY (Hon. Sec.)

2004 COMMITTEE

At the Annual General Meeting, held on the 21st January, the following were elected to the committee for 2004;

Chairman: Dave Craig
Hon Treasurer: Gary Wilkinson
Hon Secretary: Jim Megarry

Ordinary Members:

- Geraldine McErlane
 - Sam McCormick
 - Ivor McDonald
 - Des Percell
 - Richard Gray
 - Carol Gillespie
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