

PHOTO COMPETITION CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Lionacleit Museum in Benbecula was the venue for the 10th anniversary of the local Western Isles Natural History Society (Currag) Wildlife Photographic Competition recently.

The judging at the museum took place on Friday 3rd February and the evening was well attended – and much enjoyed – by members and non-members alike. As usual Comhairle nan Eilean’s Museum Service kindly hosted the event, while Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) contributed to the prize list.

Overall, sixty entries were received, including many from residents in the Western Isles. Although the photographs have to be taken in the Outer Hebrides, the event always attracts other entries from holidaymakers who live on the mainland, other parts of the UK, or even abroad. A regular visitor, contributor and prize winner is Astrid Horns from Germany who took two 2nd places this year.

The overall judging and presentations were carried out by John Love of SNH. He said: “I had no idea who had taken any of the photos whilst I was judging. Although the number of entries was down this year, the quality was higher than ever, making my job very difficult. “The Outer Hebrides offer some stunning opportunities

for photographers and although landscapes normally dominate, we had a very strong fauna section this year. If I had to choose an overall winner out of them all it would have been the winner of this section.”

Paul Boyer from South Uist submitted an amazing shot through his kitchen window of a handsome male merlin sitting on a fence post, where it had just caught and plucked an unfortunate sparrow. Local artist Bill Neill was another prize winner in this section with a fascinating close-up shot of a spider with a dragonfly in its web.

Another local entry that stood out was Dana MacPhee’s collage of the work party on the Monach Isles national nature reserve, or Heisgeir, last summer. This is a long strip of small photos – each a winner in its own right. Together they tell the story of the renovation of the old schoolhouse on Ceann Ear by the Grimsay Association. John Love continued: “It would be difficult to do justice to Dana’s innovative submission here, so I hope that folk paid a visit to Lionacleit Museum to see it, and all the other fine entries, for themselves.”

The photographs remained on display at the museum into April and a selection will then be on view for a few weeks in the window of SNH’s Stornoway Office in Francis Street.



Prize-winners Dana MacPhee and Paul Boyer

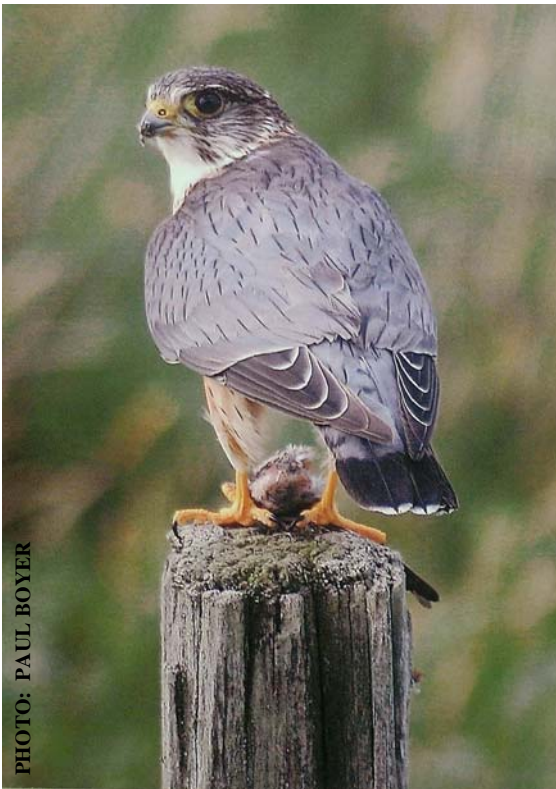


PHOTO: PAUL BOYER



PHOTO: BILL NEILL

Above: Dragonfly wrapped in a Spider’s web

Left: Male Merlin having just caught and plucked a sparrow

PRIZE WINNERS 2006

Category 1 - Landscape / Seascape

- 1st Blazin’ Callanish _____ Paul Coulter, Glasgow
- 2nd A Temporary Island _____ Astrid Horns, Rohlstorf, Germany
- 3rd The Wreck _____ Bill Neill, Askemish, South Uist

Highly Commended

- 1 Stornoway Harbour _____ Alan Battersby, Congleton, Cheshire
- 2 Christmas Morning Sunrise Kallin _____ Caroline Johnson, Grimsay, North Uist

Category 2 - Crofting Life including Fishing

- 1st The Century _____ Chris Simons, Lidington, Beds
- 2nd Traditional Croft, North Uist _____ Paul Coulter, Glasgow
- 3rd And the winner is..... _____ Paul Boyer, Carman, South Uist

Category 3 - Flora

- 1st Thrift _____ Bob Shepherd, Creagorry, Benbecula
- 2nd A Garden on the Shore _____ Bill Neill, Askemish, South Uist
- 3rd Aird Storm Woven Fence _____ Sheila MacDonald, Aird, Benbecula

Category 4 - Fauna

- 1st Merlin _____ Paul Boyer, Carman, South Uist
- 2nd Identity Parade _____ Chris Simons, Lidington, Beds
- 3rd The Dragon Snared _____ Bill Neill, Askemish, South Uist

High Commended

- 1 Otter Relaxing _____ Chris Simons, Lidington, Beds

Category 5 - Collage & Stories

- 1st Heisker Work Party _____ Dana MacPhee, Lionacleit, Benbecula
- 2nd The Gull Catwalk _____ Astrid Horns, Rohlstorf, Germany
- 3rd Knapweed Restaurant _____ Paul Boyer, Carman, South Uist

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES



The RSPB is undertaking two projects to help with the conservation of two of our indigenous species that in conservation terms are becoming important as their habitats become increasingly at risk. Here we find out how the conservation work being carried out to protect

corncrakes is being mutually beneficial in protection of the threatened great yellow bumblebee.

THE BIRDS...

The Skye Grassland for Corncrake Scheme run by RSPB and SNH continues this year by focussing on the two core corncrake areas, along the west side of Trotternish and the west side of Waternish.

Crofters are supported to leave meadows uncut and ungrazed during the corncrake breeding period. A number of crofts have also created ‘early cover’ corners as sanctuaries for the birds when they first arrive from migration in spring and again before they fly south for the winter.

Corncrake numbers in Skye have more than tripled since the start of the scheme – but it is still not certain whether all of the birds that return are being counted. From the end of April onwards, if anyone hears a calling bird, then please contact Alison MacLennan on 01471 822882.

Similar schemes are also in place in the Western Isles and the north of mainland Scotland and Orkney. Some crofters may be eligible for support, even if they live outside the core areas. For further information, contact Alan Sillence on 01470 592 357 (alan.sillence@rspb.org).



The great yellow bumblebee

... AND THE BEES

The great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) is the subject of a recent project that aims to aid the conservation of this rare insect whose population and range appear to be declining rapidly.

Because the decline of this bee is possibly linked to similar factors to those which provoked the decline in corncrake numbers, there is considerable overlap of their current range and habitat requirements. The conservation efforts are therefore mainly being co-ordinated through the framework of the successful corncrake conservation programme.

The great yellow bumblebee is now extinct through much of the UK and its breeding area has shrunk in recent years to just two main areas of population – on the Western Isles and the northern tip of mainland

Scotland and Orkney. Unfortunately, there is only one recent record of the great yellow bumble bee from Skye and the surrounding area.

The project is being run by the RSPB, in association with the Aculeate Conservation Group and is supported by funds from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It aims to conserve, and where possible improve the habitat of the Great Yellow Bumblebee.

Bumblebees, whilst being a pleasant accompaniment to summer, are also a vital ingredient to the breeding cycle of many wild flowers – and the successful production of many farm and garden crops. Currently, it is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for the decline of this particular species – especially in the Skye area.

It relies on the appearance of a range of flowers throughout the late spring and summer, both for pollen – its protein rich food – and nectar. A gap in

the succession of the flowers that provide these food sources may be a factor in the decline – perhaps due to the earlier cutting of meadows for silage rather than hay or a general loss of flower rich areas.

Some of the questions being addressed include:

- Are there more bees around than have been reported?
- Are there any gaps in the flowering sequence of the food plants it uses?
- How can the range and population level of the species be restored?
- Will it help to plant up ‘Bee mixes’ of food flowers – especially in the patches currently managed to aid corncrakes?

Surveys will be carried out to look for the presence of bees and to see if the range of plants that they need is available throughout the breeding season from May until August.

Could you spot a Great Yellow Bumblebee?

The key features are the banding of the abdomen – the back bit – which is made up of pale hair and ‘bald’ stripes – not dark coloured hair as with other bees, and the black banding of the thorax between the 2 wings. If you would like more information and to record sightings of the bees then please contact the local RSPB office on 01471 822882.

Walking with Corncrakes

Would you like to hear and find out more about corncrakes? As part of the Highland Council programme of summertime walks anyone can get a valuable insight into these birds, but be prepared for a night-time excursion as they mainly call after dark! The walks on 9 and 23 June leave from the Stein Inn in Waternish, Skye, at 11pm. Call in advance if the weather is poor.