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## Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve

**NEWSLETTER No. 39**

**January 2020**

Welcome to the 39th Newsletter, now in its 21st year. I start with a bit of an apology as it seems a long time since the last newsletter mainly due to a very busy year! Finally we managed to secure LEADER funding to allow us to start and complete the construction of the Education Pavilion on Tentsmuir Point. A good deal of stress during construction but utter joy and excitement when we had our official Opening Event in June 2019.

This year is going to be equally busy and exciting as it is the Year of Coasts & Waters 2020. Some of our events are listed inside, read on.

Many of you will have already met our new Student Placement Marijke Leith who has joined Alex and I for a year in Paradise. We also have Molly Aldam another student placement working on encouraging new groups to visit Tentsmuir and a brilliant new photographer in residence Steve Buckland – meet them all inside.



**The Education Pavilion on Tentsmuir Point. – Image by Marijke Leith**

**Tom Cunningham & Marijke Leith & Alex Easson  
Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve**

## TENTSMUIR NNR

### INTRODUCING STUDENT PLACEMENT MARIJKE LEITH

I studied BSc Zoology at the University of Aberdeen and during my degree I found an interest in conservation and environmental education. By graduation I knew I wanted to work in a ranger type role and in July I started at Tentsmuir NNR (Paradise). It confirmed that my passion in nature is not only enjoying it myself, but to share it with others who are equally enthusiastic and even those who have not experienced it before. The other day we had a school group out and one girl had never been to the beach before. Seeing her face and sense of awe and being able to share the beauty of the environment was something I won't forget in a hurry.

I am now halfway through my placement here and I have learned so much from colleagues, volunteers and groups visiting. Having a year of hands on experience working on a Reserve and being able to organise events is a fantastic opportunity that I am grateful for and I intend to make the most of every minute of it.

The highlights so far are seeing a pair of spotted flycatcher chicks in their nest on the brand new Education Pavilion, seeing the occasional water rail at Morton Lochs, surveying butterflies on a sunny day at Tentsmuir Point and, of course, feeding the red squirrels daily. Tentsmuir really is a special place and deserves the title of Paradise.



**Marijke Leith on the right**

## THE AWARD WINNING TENTSMUIR NNR EDUCATION PAVILION



In the last newsletter the funding for the Education Pavilion was uncertain but we did not give up hope and saw it as a temporary setback. Quite rightly so as we can proudly reveal that after a great deal of work we received a generous grant from LEADER to match fund SNH's contribution and work could finally start resulting in its completion and grand opening in June 2019!

Not only that but the building is now the proud winner of a 2019 Education Buildings Scotland award under the title of 'Inspiring Learning Spaces' which it certainly is. This was a major achievement as we were up against multi-million pound schools ..... what a brilliant way to start its first year!

The building was designed by local architect Kirsty Macguire, and created to blend into the landscape and made of non-toxic, recyclable and reusable materials that, at the end of its life, will allow it to be deconstructed leaving behind no trace. Since the building has opened the surrounding grasses have grown back in, a pair of spotted flycatchers raised and fledged a brood of two on a rafter in the structure, and countless groups have already enjoyed the shelter, reading the new interpretation panels and relaxing on the oak benches that this brilliant building provides. A true asset to an already impressive site. Our thanks go to Hatrick Bruce and the team who constructed this intricate beautiful building.

Since then the Education Pavilion has been the starting point of 4 education visits and 9 guided walks with many more booked throughout 2020.

### The Education Pavilion Opening Ceremony



**Chief Executive  
Francesca  
Osowska &  
Newport Primary  
School pupils  
cutting the ribbon.**

One of the proudest days of my life and a very emotional one as well, was 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019 when we officially opened the Education Pavilion. With Head of Nature Reserves, Stuart MacQuarrie, piping everyone up to the Pavilion and with over ninety people, many of whom had provided letters of support and the pupils of a class from Newport Primary School. I selected two pupils, my lovely granddaughter Ruby and her friend Louise and along with our Chief Executive Francesca Osowska they cut the red ribbon. An unforgettable great day.



**Head of Nature Reserves Stuart MacQuarrie pipes the group at the opening event**

## **YEAR of COASTS and WATERS 2020**



**The logo for the Year of Coasts & Waters**

2020 is the Year of Coast and Waters, a themed year led by VisitScotland, celebrating Scotland's fantastic coasts and waters. At Tentsmuir NNR we celebrate our coast and waters every year but 2020 will be filled with events showcasing the importance of both the ever changing coastline and the tranquil Morton Lochs.

To kick off the year we are launching **'Four for the Shore'** on February 4<sup>th</sup> at Tentsmuir Point – a beach clean initiative to encourage the public to collect 4 pieces of litter (or more) using the equipment provided and then deposit the equipment and the litter back at the boxes at the



entrance/exit point. If everyone does a little bit, we can try and reduce the plastic pollution which has a devastating impact on marine life, whilst also keeping the beach pristine. The boxes are made from wood we had left from different projects and the pegs to hang the bags made from old tool handles – upcycling is great for reducing waste and allows you to get creative.

A great team effort which will hopefully make litter picking the norm, whilst out enjoying the scenery and wildlife.

We will have three “Four for the Shore” sets of boxes located at the following places:

1. At the kissing gate at north end of Tentsmuir Point.
2. Close to the foreshore by the WW2 Command Post (up from the Icehouse gate).
3. At the kissing gate at the southern end of Tentsmuir Point.

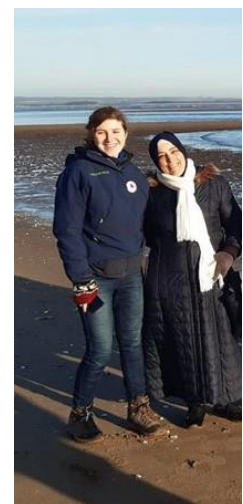
Please return the litter pickers and empty the litter into the open box next to the tool box, and return the bag as well please. We will have regular patrols to take all the collected litter away and dispose of it properly.

## **INTRODUCING GRADUATE PLACEMENT MOLLY ALDAM**

I've been working on community engagement and events at Tentsmuir since September.

After studying MSc Environment, Culture and Society at the University of Edinburgh, I started a Graduate Placement with SNH focused on enabling wider demographics to get out to this beautiful NNR - especially people facing barriers like low income and disability.

I've been organising our Year of Coast and Waters events, as well as guided walks and activities for different groups from Dundee. So far this year we've had a group of women refugees group from Lochee, a Green Health Prescriptions group, and some creative writers from Coldside Community Centre! I have a passion for creative writing so I'm excited to be running the Tentsmuir poetry competition (see below), and to have the winners' poems on show on the reserve. I hope to see some of you at our event as part of StAnza poetry festival in St Andrews, with some absolutely brilliant poets celebrating Tentsmuir!



Molly on the left

## **A Call for poetry inspired by Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve**

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is calling on all poets to share their love of nature and landscapes by writing a poem inspired by Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve.

*The Coast Lines of Tentsmuir* poetry competition is looking for poems inspired by Tentsmuir's coastline, with categories for 8-15 year olds and adults 16 and above. The contest is part of the celebrations for the Year of Coast and Waters 2020.

The winners' poems will be displayed on the NNR. In addition, poems will be published on SNH's online platforms, and winners will have the opportunity to read their poems at the StAnza Poetry Festival in The Byre Theatre in St Andrews on Wednesday, 4 March.

### **Guidelines and tips**

- We're looking for poems with a coastal or watery theme
- The maximum length of entries is one side of A4
- Pay attention to layout and creative ways that your poem could be inscribed in Tentsmuir's landscape. Perhaps lines along a bench, or a pane with the sea showing through?
- We may select some lines or verses from the winning poem for inscription, rather than displaying its entirety.

Entries should be emailed to [Molly.Aldam@nature.scot](mailto:Molly.Aldam@nature.scot), stating which age category is being entered. The deadline for entries is midnight on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February. For more contest details, see <https://bit.ly/2G6Azsb>

The competition is one of several special SNH events and projects to celebrate Scotland's coasts and waters and their wildlife, and raise awareness of the importance of healthy oceans.

## **WHATS ON**

We start with an exciting event which is a first for us. We are taking part in the prestigious STANZA event in St Andrews, Scotland's International Poetry Festival. Our colleague Molly Aldam has been liaising with the STANZA committee to organize a special event celebrating Tentsmuir and an exciting competition.

### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March, 14:00 - 15:45 – Coastlines: Sea poetry from Tentsmuir (in partnership with StAnza Festival and PAMIS)**

Byre Theatre, Abbey Street - Studio Theatre. Free but ticketed event.

We will have poetry readings about Tentsmuir and the coast from poets Anna Crowe, Jim Crumley, Valerie Gillies – as well as poems by the late Jim Stewart read by his student Pete Cunningham. We will also have an original multi-sensory poem about Tentsmuir, performed by storyteller Maureen Phillip and others supported by the charity PAMIS for Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. The winners of our poetry competition will also have an opportunity to perform their work!

### **Monday & Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> March – From 6pm to 10pm.**

Led by moth experts Colin Edwards and Nigel Voaden. Lunar Yellow Underwing is a very scarce moth in Scotland with Tentsmuir being its last surviving site. In England Lunar Yellow Underwing is most regularly and successfully monitored and surveyed via night-time caterpillar searches, usually between November and March. This is something that we have only occasionally undertaken in Scotland, until now. To help us improve our chances of finding larvae we will be

led by Sharon Hearle, Butterfly Conservation's East England Regional Conservation Manager. Sharon has a wealth of experience managing for and monitoring Lunar Yellow Underwing, especially at the larval stage, at a number of Breckland sites in Suffolk. Sharon will be visiting Tentsmuir during the day prior to the night-time surveys to help locate the most suitable habitat, bare ground with adjacent fine-leaved grasses that we will search after dark.

Help us to survey for the Yellow Lunar Underwing moth larvae search during the evenings. The event is free and booking is essential, contact Tom Cunningham by telephone or email for details.

**Tuesday 7th April, time TBC - Accessible Easter fun day, in partnership with PAMIS**  
Tentsmuir Education Pavilion. Free but limited spaces and booking required.

A multi-sensory storytelling yurt with Maureen Phillips, pony beach clean rides with Pony Axe S, and beach crafts with artist Jean Duncan! This event is for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities but is open to all children where spaces are available - get in touch with [Molly.Aldam@nature.scot](mailto:Molly.Aldam@nature.scot).

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1-4pm – Easter Open Day**

Join the Tentsmuir Team all afternoon for some Easter-themed natural crafts, plus yoga and mindfulness!

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May** - Dragonfly and damselfly identification and pond dipping day.  
With Daniele Muir of British Dragonfly Society. It is FREE and booking is essential, contact me details at the end of the Newsletter. Daniele provided this:

I have put details of the Larvae Workshop up on the website here: <https://british-dragonflies.org.uk/event/larvae-id-workshop-at-morton-lochs-dragonfly-hotspot-near-tayport-fife/>

**Tuesday 7th July and Tuesday 14th July – Forest and Sea Bushcraft with Willow Lohr**  
**Free but booking required.**

We are very excited to have bushcraft specialist Willow Lohr at Tentsmuir for two days in the Summer Holidays. Aimed at families with kids aged 7-12, Willow will teach us traditional skills such as carving, tracking and hand netting. More details and booking info to come soon!

Keep your eyes peeled for other events and dates on our Facebook page, on our Tentsmuir NNR website and notices in the hides and monolith structure notices.

As the days get longer and we head towards spring there are lots to look forward to. There have been great sightings over winter of crossbills and kingfisher at Morton Lochs, thousands of eider ducks down at Tentsmuir Point and of course the red squirrels with their winter tufted ears at Morton Lochs and through the forest.

## PHOTGRAPHER in RESIDENCE

For a number of years I watched Steve Buckland walking around the Reserve sites looking and photographing wildlife and the landscapes of Tentsmuir. I was fortunate enough that Steve sent me some of his images. I was inspired (that light bulb moment) when I thought I should ask Steve if he would like to be our Photographer in Residence. I was knocked over when he agreed and I was even more bowled over when he sent me his incredible wildlife species data! Steve is truly amazing and I thank him very much for sharing his data, and also for his truly amazing images which you can all see on our Facebook page. For example Steve has identified over 80 species of Hoverfly, it's just amazing.



**Photographer in Residence Steve Buckland**

I am Professor of Statistics at St Andrews. I am now semi-retired, but about 20 years ago, I established a research centre, the Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modelling. I am no longer its director, but it continues to thrive. I specialise in methods to estimate abundance of wild animal populations, to model the dynamics of animal populations, and to monitor trends in biodiversity. I have worked with a wide variety of government agencies, NGOs and international commissions from around the world. There is even a Wikipedia page about me – fame at last! ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Buckland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Buckland)) Now taking things a lot easier!

**A small selection of Steve's brilliant images:**



**Left: male crossbill,  
Right: Sphaerophoria scripta hoverfly,**





**Left: young otter**  
**Right: the kingfisher.**

## **Group visits to Tentsmuir NNR**

Although January isn't over we have already had some fantastic group visits and on each visit the sun has been shining! We've enjoyed visits from a women's refugee group, a creative writing group and a wellbeing walking group. Another group that visited were 'The Green Health Prescription' group and had been prescribed by the GP to get outside into nature and we hope to have similar visits in the future.

All the groups that visit enjoy the expanse of beach and they can hardly resist going close to the water's edge and investigating the range of shells that are washed on the shore. One woman enjoyed it so much she wanted to return the next day!



## **VOLUNTEERS' DAY OUT**

The volunteers at Tentsmuir NNR really are the backbone of the reserve and so much of the critical management work and wildlife data collection is done by them. In the last ten months the total days of voluntary work was 330, an incredible figure which allows us to continue regular species surveys, carry out regular maintenance work, carry out projects and assist with

events amongst so many other things. A huge thank you to all our volunteers and all the work they do, we couldn't do it without them. To thank them for the work they do we went on a day trip to another coastal NNR – St Cyrus!

We enjoyed being guided around the Reserve by the fantastic NNR manager, Therese Alampo and her brilliant assistant Simon Ritchie. The sun was shining and there were plenty of sandwiches to keep everyone happy! At the end we were asked to sum up in one word how being outside feels and write it on a piece of paper. 'Peaceful', 'Buzzing', 'Better' and 'Inspired' were some of the chosen words and I have to say I completely agree.



## CREATING a POLLINATOR TRAIL at MORTON LOCHS.

Our colleague Jim Jeffrey is leading this very important project nationally on some of our NNRs and asked us to plant and spread a special blend of wildflowers & grasses that will be akin to relic sand dune soils.

Although wildflowers might make you think of spring, we were planting in September to create new patches of wildflowers around the paths at Morton Lochs. Marijke has been leading this project and worked with a group of young volunteers working towards the 'Out There Award' run by Ramblers Scotland to plant both wildflower seeds and 200 plugs. Come spring, we will hopefully see a burst of wildflowers and be able to enjoy the results of our hard work. We are hoping to launch a pollinator trail this year to highlight the diversity of pollinators and their importance. The trail will use existing paths to highlight what plants can be used to help pollinators such as bees and butterflies and the important job they do in nature.



The group sowing wildflower seed mix at Morton Lochs. Images by Marijke Leith

## RESEARCH ON THE RESERVE

It has been a busy year on the Reserve with 20 research studies taking place, students coming from the nearby Universities of St Andrews and Dundee but also further afield such as Loughborough University. Tentsmuir NNR is one of the top three NNRs for research in Scotland with research projects including : Investigating the sensitivity of dune slacks to climate change and eutrophication, an investigation into the differences in behavioural budgets between and within Anatidae species at Morton Lochs, an investigation of the effect of the various management strategies used at Tentsmuir on soil properties and vegetation characteristic, studies of Tayport saltmarsh and research of hoverflies, dragonflies & damselflies and other invertebrates at Morton Lochs & Tentsmuir Point. This is alongside our own studies of the bird species, geese, butterflies, moths and dragonflies and damselflies.

## A NEW BOOK ON TENTSMUIR

### **Professor Robert M M Crawford: Tentsmuir Ten Thousand Years of Environmental History.**

After 5 years of researching and writing, Bob's book about Tentsmuir NNR and the Tentsmuir area was published in June 2019. The title has changed since the early versions and it makes for an incredible read. His work covers well over 10,000 years ago; tells the history of the people who once inhabited Tentsmuir right up-to-date. The book is available from the publishers Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. Oxford.

A big thank you to Bob for writing the book.

## VIEW FROM THE SQUIRREL HIDE

The hide has become very popular and so special to a lot of visitors we have spoken to some people who travel regularly for example from Brechin, Peterhead and Glasgow just to see the squirrels and birds that frequent the site. In addition to the squirrels, you can observe great spotted woodpeckers, tree creepers, coal tits, blue tits, long-tailed tits, wrens, chaffinches, sparrowhawk, buzzard and, if you are really lucky, spot badgers snuffling around at the base of the trees picking at the dropped nuts.



**Red Squirrel leaping by Steve Buckland.**



## LOOK OUT FOR NEWS

### **NOW FOR A LOVELY TRUE STORY and WHAT READING THE NEWSLETTER IS ALL ABOUT FOR SOME PEOPLE.**

We were visiting my wife's elderly Aunt Vera in her sheltered housing flat in the middle of Newcastle. During a lull in the conversations Vera said to me "I miss your Newsletter, have you stopped it?" I replied "no, it's just been so busy with so many projects especially the building of the new Education Pavilion, I haven't had the time. But it will be coming out soon".

Vera replied "I miss it, I love reading all about the Reserve, as soon as I open it and start to read... I can smell the outdoors." What an emotional moment....


If you can't wait until the next newsletter keep up to date with what's going on at Tentsmuir NNR by checking our website [www.nature.scot/tentsmuir](http://www.nature.scot/tentsmuir)

And follow our [Facebook](#) page – search for [Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve](#) .... and "Like" it.

Or just email me [Tom.cunningham@nature.scot](mailto:Tom.cunningham@nature.scot)

**NB** Our email addresses have changed keep this in mind and make the change in your email address book.

**Cheers Tom, Marijke & Alex**

PS I think I am almost happy as Raith Rovers (at the time of writing) are still top of the league but would you believe we haven't been firing on all cylinders (due to horrendous injuries to players and suspensions) so the question is, will we win the league? 

PPS Our Chief Executive is a Spurs fan. Just saying.

PPS And David Steel, the Isle of May Nature Reserve Manager supports Gateshead FC, it's a tough life supporting the wee teams.

## **AND FINALLY**

I had said I would retire once the Education Pavilion was completed – thinking this would be in 2017 or early 2018 however, this is done now. So I have decided I will retire at the end of June 2020. My wife will have finished her degree in Art & Philosophy at the same time and we will walk into the sunset and enjoy life together. But there will be one last Newsletter coming out during June so I will leave the farewells until then....