

CBO e-News

Copeland Bird Observatory e-Newsletter (Summer 2014)



Date for your Diary

CBO Dinner - 60th Anniversary

Venue: Cranethorpe Suite in the Park Avenue Hotel, Holywood Road, Belfast.

Date: Saturday 1st November 2014.

Time: 7:00pm for 7:30pm.

Price: Tickets will be in the range of £25 - £30.

After dinner entertainment will take the form of a pictorial voyage through the last 60 years at the observatory. More details to be sent out soon.

The Copeland Bird Observatory (CBO) was formed in 1954 and is Northern Ireland's only bird observatory. The main aims of the Observatory are to collect data on migratory and breeding birds, to manage the island for the benefit of birds, and to develop and manage a conservation education programme. It is operated on a part-time basis by volunteers and is open from late March to the end of October.

CBO Website:

www.copelandbirdobservatory.org.uk

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/copelandbirdobservatory



Observatory Building

Newsletter Articles

Please forward your stories and photographs for future issues to Niall Waterman.

Email: niallwaterman@hotmail.com

Spring Visitor to CBO

It is always exciting when a Ring Ouzel arrives on the island. The species is now so scarce in Ireland that it is a privilege to see one, let alone handle one!



Ring Ouzel (© Richard Donaghey)

On 17th April, while Richard Donaghey and I were doing the rounds, Richard reported a brief possible sighting of one, though he couldn't be sure. Shortly after, I had a momentary glimpse of a bird on the west wall of the South Garden, which was almost certainly a Ring Ouzel, so by this stage we were fairly certain that a Ring Ouzel was on the island.

When Richard and I were driving the Heli Trap, a Ring Ouzel doubled back over our heads and flew in the direction of the North Garden – "another opportunity lost", we thought. However, not so! Soon after, we were in the vicinity of the Heli Bushes again when Richard saw a Blackbird-sized bird fly up into the trap. Excited, we drove the trap to find a Ring Ouzel in the catching-box. The bird was probably attracted back to the trap after discovering the wheat with which it had been baited. Removing the bird from the catching-box was a magic moment. Richard ringed it, so shared honours!

The last record was of a male seen on 16th April, 2006. This one, a young male, was the 23rd Ring Ouzel to be ringed at the Observatory, and was 14 years after the last one. Ironically, it was re-trapped 2 days later in the Wall Trap.

Chris Acheson

CBO Day Trips

In May, the CBO successfully ran a number of day trips to the island. Day trips consisted of parties from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) bird classes, a Belfast RSPB group, a private wildlife group and two trips organised through Discover Ards for members of the public. In September, the CBO plan to participate in the European Heritage Open Days for the first time by organising two boat trips to the island. More information on European Heritage Open Days can be found at: <http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/nica/ehod.aspx>.



Discover Ards Party (10th May) with guide Eimear Rooney (red top)

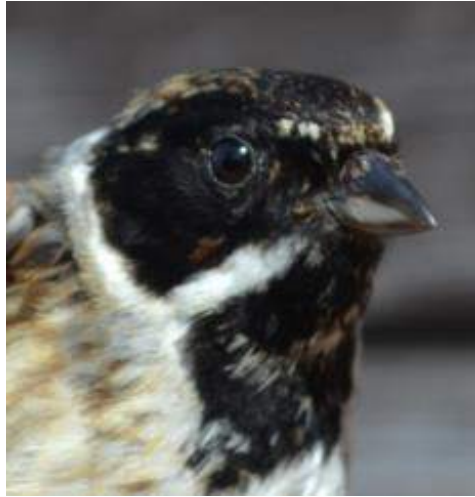


QUB Bangor Bird Class (31st May)

Test Your Identification Skills (Answers on Page 8)



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)

Visiting the Copeland Bird Observatory (CBO)

Trips to the CBO should be booked in advance through the Bookings Secretary.

David Galbraith (Bookings Secretary) – **Tel:** 028 9338 2539, **Mob:** 07885 834398

Email: davidgalbraith903@btinternet.com

Gully Trap Conservation Project

62nd Belfast Explorer Scouts (the section for 15-18 years old) visited Copeland Bird Observatory for the weekend 4th-6th July 2014 along with Chris Acheson as Duty Officer (DO). For all except their leader John Lyons, who is almost a founder member, it was a completely new experience which they all enjoyed. They also dismantled the Gully Trap, as a conservation project, as the old wire had rusted away in the salty Copeland air. John remembers helping to build the original sometime in the 1950s.



Chris and team working on the Gully Trap



One of the Scouts enjoying a break

Shearwatering at night was generally agreed to be the highlight and fortunately a few were obliging enough to allow themselves to be caught and ringed. We also enjoyed the sight of 25 Puffins close to the cliff where a soundtrack, powered by solar panels, is attempting to lure them onshore to nest. A sort of variation of Homer's Iliad thousands of years ago with sirens which are the creation of modern technology beloved by this generation rather than the tempting nymphs in the original tale.



A full RIB at Donaghadee Harbour

A few pics complete the story which started and finished with a breath catching ride in the new RIB to add to the excitement.

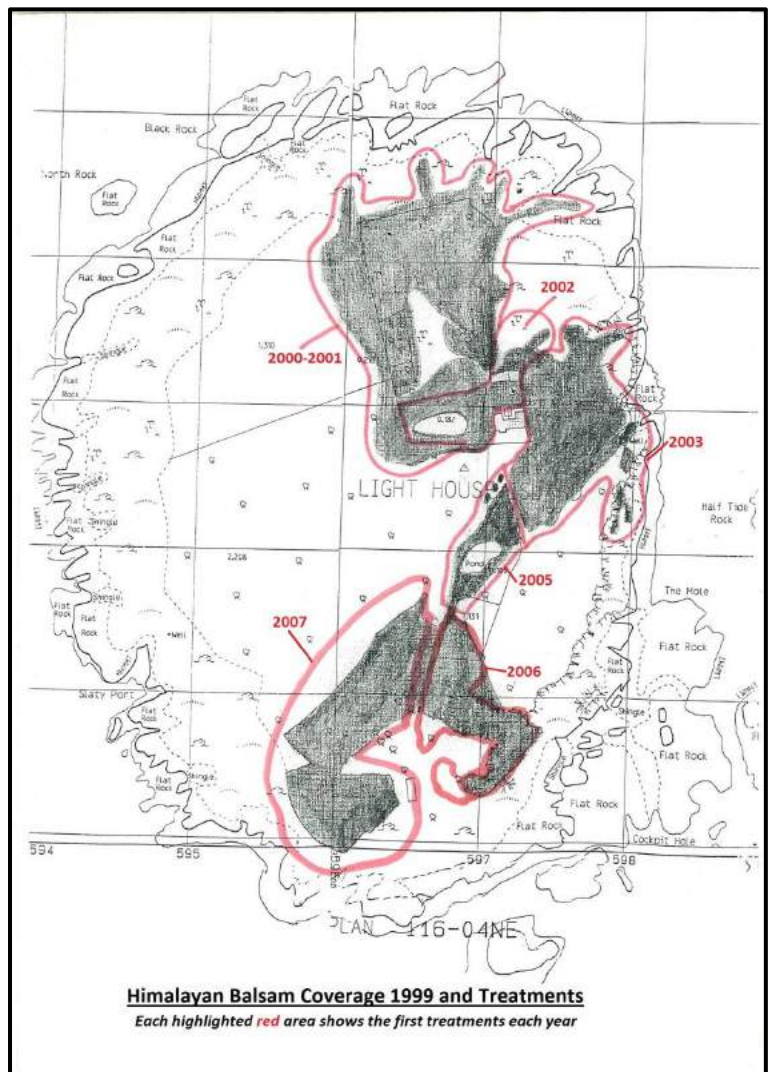
John Lyons

Himalyan Balsam Eradication Continues

Ten balsam plants were found on 28th June. They were pulled out of the ground and the roots chopped off by Ian, Helen and Eve Humphreys.



Himalyan Balsam plant



The eradication of the Invasive Non Native plant was begun in 1999, after the extent of it was accurately mapped. A sizable block was tackled each year, planned to minimise the length of edge against untreated areas, which can throw seed 10 to 15 metres back into cleared areas. Each area was painstakingly checked in subsequent years, with a zero tolerance approach adopted for each area already cleared in previous years. A new block was started every year until 2008, when finally every part of the island had been tackled. Since then it has become harder to find any plants, but usually a few have been found in singles and in small groups.

If you see any balsam plants on the island, please pull them out by the root, chop it off and place the flowers or seed pods nearby on one of the paths. Oh, and draw the position you found it on the map in the kitchen. Thank you and good luck!

Ian McKee

Updating Contact Details

Please contact the Membership Secretary if your contact details change (e.g. new email address).

Ron Bishop (Membership Secretary) – **Tel:** 028 9336 4040, **Email:** rh.bishop1@gmail.com

The Diversity of Plants on CBO

The paths and areas that have been restored by mowing and constantly removing the cuttings have resulted in a habitat which is more diverse in terms of plant species. Check out these plants found on the short sward Maritime Cliff and Slope habitat found on CBO.

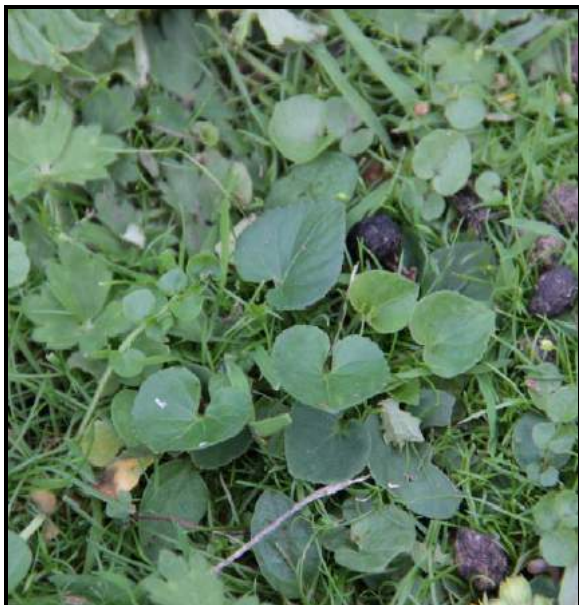


Fescue Rubra (Red Fescue), covers up to 95% of the ground surface in places.

Most of the remaining ground is covered by mosses, which has taken advantage of the death of most areas of Yorkshire Fog in the dry spring of 2012. This event demonstrates that Yorkshire fog is not a stress tolerator, unlike the Fescue grasses which remained very healthy and indeed increased its cover due to the reduced competition. However if you spend the time and search hard enough you can also find:



Pennywort & Silverweed both do well in the wetter flushed soils.



Common Violet - does well if there is a little cover from surrounding low plants such as Ragwort or Red Campion.



Brookweed - likes the wetter soils as well.



Eyebright - likes drier areas.



Scarlet Pimpernel - likes drier areas.

If you wish to volunteer to help with the habitat management to encourage the spread of these plants into larger areas on the island, please email cbohabitat@gmail.com for more information.

Ian McKee

NGO Challenge Fund Celebration Event 2014

The Challenge Fund, launched in 2011, has enabled environmental NGOs in Northern Ireland to carry out projects with practical benefits for the environment. This year was another highly successful year for the Challenge Fund, with over £2 million allocated to over 250 projects through the Department of the Environment's Carrier Bag Levy. The CBO was one of the organisations that benefitted from the fund with an award of £30k to purchase a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) to improve marine access to the Observatory. The NGO Challenge Fund 2014 was administered by the Northern Ireland Environmental Link (NIEL).



CBO Humber RIB ('Copeland Shearwater')

On 12th June 2014, Brenda Campbell and Niall Waterman represented CBO at the Challenge Fund 2014 Celebration Event at Beech Hill Country House Hotel in Derry/Londonderry. The event brought together projects from across Northern Ireland, providing the participants with the opportunity to share and celebrate the successes and positive environmental outcomes that have come about as a result of the programme.



CBO display at Challenge Fund Celebration Event



Mark Durkan, Minister of the Environment, at the CBO display

Black-Headed Gull Colony on CBO

The Black-headed Gull colony on the Copeland Islands is one of three which are included in a colour-ringing study into the species here. This is the second breeding season of the project and on 22 June, a small team of CBO members visited the Observatory with the aim of ringing young Black-headed Gulls. Last year, we didn't ring the small gulls in the colony on CBO as the terns and gulls were all mixed together and we didn't want to cause any unnecessary disturbance. We did, however, ring them on Mew Island. This year, as the colony was segregated, we had an opportunity to ring birds around the East Landing.

It seems that we were slightly too late for the Black-headed Gulls though, as many young were already on the wing and in the end, we were happy to add 19 new colour-ringed birds to the tally for 2014.



Adam McClure and Chris Acheson recording data

The project relies on re-sightings from members of the public, so please make sure and check those gull flocks! If you see any colour-ringed birds, please report them to bhgni@ymail.com. You can find out more about the project, including the objectives of the study, by visiting www.bhgullsni.blogspot.co.uk.

Adam McClure



CBO ringing team



Philip Galbraith ringing Black-Headed Gulls

Answers to Identification Skills Test on Page 3:

(a) Red Campion (b) Reed Bunting (Male) (c) Eider Duck (Female) (d) Nest: Black-Headed Gull (e) Nest: Eider (f) Nest: Oystercatcher (g) Ringlet (h) Herring Gull (i) Buzzard

CBO is supported by the following:

