



Getting ready for summer

Montrose Basin volunteers hit the sun(flower) beds in preparation for summer and 'rush' to help staff manage vegetation!

During April our volunteers created a new habitat at Montrose Basin Visitor Centre which will hopefully attract a wide range of birds and insects.

Looking towards the western side of the Visitor Centre grounds from the main viewing gallery, you can see an area which looks like a vegetable patch. This area was cleared of turf and turned over by volunteers (see pic below) who have planted it with seeds which we hope will grow into huge sunflowers and provide a natural seed supply in the autumn for birds such as linnets, yellowhammers, goldfinches and tree sparrows.

Volunteers 'rush' to help

Historically the pools in front of the Centre were used to evaporate sea water in the salt making process.

These pools gradually became vegetated with rush and the loss of open water degraded this area as a habitat for many species of bird.



Back in 2008, a contractor dug out the pools using a digger

which opened up shallow scrapes for waders whilst creating deeper areas to attract dabbling ducks like mallard, teal and wigeon.



Since 2010 the Trust have used sheep to help maintain a short sward (see below), unfortunately though they cannot prevent rush from encroaching the open water of the pools. This is where we rely on the manpower of our dedicated team of volunteers.

Throughout the summer months the rush requires regular cutting and this labour-intensive job would not be possible without the time and effort put in by volunteers who cut, rake and remove piles of rush, creating an open water habitat which attracts ducks, waders and even a stunning female kingfisher!



Flying Flock return

A small group of the Scottish Wildlife Trust's very own flock of sheep spent the second half of last year grazing the Salt Pans at Montrose Basin as it was hoped that through grazing they would enhance the salt marsh habitat and many transitional swamp communities; maintain high biodiversity within the sward; while encouraging wildfowl by providing a more palatable sward for grazing and wading birds by improving visibility for predator evasion and muddying pool margins.

The sheep did a great job and over the winter months we had a wide range of waders and wildfowl use the site for feeding and roosting, and the 'Flying Flock' as they are known, have once again touched down at Montrose for another season. The Salt Pans site is ideally located beside Montrose Basin Visitor Centre, so why not call in to see us and these whimsical woolly wonders in action?



Migrant update

Below is a list of dates when resident migrant species were first recorded on Montrose Basin this year:

Sand martin - 23rd March; Chiffchaff - 24th March; Swallow (below right) - 4th April; Willow warbler - 11th April; osprey - 14th April; blackcap, common sandpiper, sandwich tern - 17th April; grasshopper warbler (below left) - 20th April; sedge warbler - 21st April; common whitethroat - 24th April; common tern - 28th April; garden warbler - 1st May; swift - 5th May.

You can keep up to date with reserve sightings and other stories from Montrose Basin by



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following our fantastic new wildlife blog which has lots of (hopefully!) interesting and useful information and plenty of nice photographs from this wonderful reserve.

You can access the new blog by visiting:

<http://blogs.swt.org.uk/montrosebasin>



Surveys & monitoring: Breeding eiders

Montrose Basin is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for breeding eiders, which means that it is a nationally important site for the species. In order to monitor the number of breeding pairs on the reserve and to find out how productive their nests are, staff and volunteers conduct a survey of eider every couple of years.

As the survey was missed in 2010, we decided to carry out the monitoring this spring. The survey is conducted by dividing up the areas we know the eiders prefer to nest into sections and very slowly walking each section, marking any nests we find. This ensures nests are not missed or double counted. Information recorded includes if the female is sitting on the nest or if she isn't there, how many eggs she has.

Once we have walked all of the sections we leave it for several weeks before making a second visit after all the ducklings have left their nests. The purpose of this visit is to check how productive the nests were, in particular we are looking out for any eggs which have not hatched or nests which have been predated.

Through careful planning and slow walking, we minimise the disturbance to the nesting eiders. Should we accidentally scare off a sitting bird, we carefully cover her eggs with down from the nest to keep them warm until she returns, which she does fairly soon after we move on. The photo shows staff and volunteers looking for eider nests during May 2011.



Upcoming events

There is plenty going on at Montrose Basin to keep the whole family entertained this summer:

Journey to the centre of the mud	Sunday 19th June	10.00am-2.30pm
Children's activities - Pondamonium	Wednesday 13th July	10.30am-12.30pm
Ranger reserve ramble	Saturday 16th July	12.30pm-4.30pm
Children's activities - Rockpool ramble	Wednesday 20th July	10.30am-12.30pm
Children's activities - Bugs & beasties	Wednesday 27th July	10.30am-12.30pm
Children's activities - Mud glorious mud!	Wednesday 3rd August	10.30am-12.30pm

Information on all Scottish Wildlife Trust events at Montrose Basin, including prices and meeting points can be obtained from the Visitor Centre. We also have full programmes for events right across Scotland.



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