

NESS INFORMATION SERVICE
 NESSLETTER 115
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CORRECTION

Dops sorry department. In NIS114 I reported that when I met Adrian Shine on our last day at the loch he told me about the Preliminary findings of the Discovery fish count. He telephoned to Point out that was not so. The figures he quoted were those obtained from earlier work done by the Loch Ness Project. As we had been at the Discovery dinner the previous evening and discussing the work they had been doing, I presumed that the conversation the next day was a continuation of that. It was not. It is important to correct this as Adrian had signed a disclaimer when the collaboration between the Project and Urquhart/Discovery was being finalized. The Project undertook not to reveal any of the expeditions findings before they were officially released, also to refrain from derogatory statements about any of the work.

Adrian gave me some of the Project's figures, 3.1 Kilos Per hectare which gives 17+ metric tonnes, on another occasion they had calculated a weight of 4.2 Kilos Per hectare, 24 metric tonnes. These figures were obtained in open water and do not take into account the margins of the loch or the layer of water near the bottom. Considering there is a large bottom dwelling population of eels and that the majority of salmon moving through the loch follow the shoreline, it would be reasonable to suggest these tonnage figures could be increased. Adrian said that in his opinion the figure could be as high as 30 metric tonne. These figures would support predators but perhaps not very large predators. He also told me that the bookmakers had taken wagers that a new animal would be discovered in the loch, but had refused to pay out on the new nematode worms. They said it was human error on their part not to specify size.

DOLPHINS

Not in Loch Ness but in the Moray Firth. More than 100 bottlenose dolphins live in the Moray Firth although attempts to identify individuals only began in 1989. There is only one other known resident population of these dolphins in U.K. waters, in Cardigan Bay, Wales. The Moray Firth dolphins have a long lifespan which makes their family and social behaviour difficult to assess. At the moment little is known about normal family size, birth rates and life expectancy. A regular watch for the dolphins is kept at Tarbet/Balintore, Cromarty, Fortrose and South Kessock. Earlier this year an appeal was put out for more watchers. They record when the dolphins are present in particular areas, the numbers and size of the animals as well as behaviour and direction of travel. The information is used nationally by Dr Peter Evans of Seawatch as well as locally by Dr Paul Thompson and Ben Wilson of the Aberdeen University field station at Cromarty. Watchers need no special qualification or experience just enthusiasm and patience.

In 1991 scientists from the Universities of Cambridge and Loughborough, using the Moray Firth dolphins, carried out initial trials of the 'acoustic reflectors' they had been developing, with great success. This pioneering work could prevent the needless killing of thousands of dolphins worldwide every year. This has been brought about over recent years by the introduction of 'improved' fishing methods, using drift nets of great length made from extremely strong monofilament nylon. Being very fine dolphins and similar animals cannot detect them with their inbuilt sonar, and become entangled. Termed 'walls of death' by many conservationists, they are taking a terrible toll of marine mammals. The reflectors, when attached to the nets act in a similar manner to 'cats eyes' on roads. They bounce back the sonar signals transmitted naturally by the dolphins giving an early warning and helping prevent entanglement. The research team were looking for financial backing to develop and get the reflectors into production.

In July 1993 Scottish Natural Heritage launched a campaign called Dolphin Awareness to protect the bottlenose dolphins as well as porpoises and whales. A set of guidelines has been issued urging motorised water

sports enthusiasts to take care when on the firth. They have produced 10,000 leaflets and are erecting 10 fibreglass notice boards at points along the Moray Firth coast. Actor John Gordon-Sinclair unveiled the North Kessock notice board at a ceremony attended by a number of local officials. It was said the scale of jet-skiing and power boating is still comparatively modest in the firth so now is the time to set up constructive dialogue between the different interest groups and prevent potential problems arising. The guidelines urge firth users to avoid sudden changes of speed and direction so as not to scare or confuse the mammals, not to travel at high speed, avoid heading straight for dolphins or porpoises and not to swim with, touch or feed them for safety reasons. Chairman of SNH's North West regional board said it was heartening to see how local communities had developed an affinity with the dolphins. After only recently becoming aware of being lucky to have such a population there to be seen regularly. A member of the Personal Watercraft Association said that while the Moray Firth was relatively uncrowded there was a need to set down guidelines. It makes sense that water users are made aware of these animals and the impact that their sport has on their lives so they can help to conserve what is the epitome of beautiful wildlife in the Moray Firth.

It has been noted that some of the Moray dolphins have a skin disease and scientists are looking for a possible cause. There has been some correspondence concerning pollution in the Moray Firth in the Inverness Courier. In a recent letter James Cornwall, of Fortrose, said that while coastal shipping, fishing boats and pleasure craft were possibly partly to blame, he thought they were not the only culprits. He had found patches of light oil mixed with sewage while watching the seals off Chanorly Point from his kayak. He thought these were more likely to have emanated from the short sea outfalls at Fortrose and Rosemarkie. The sewage (liquids and solids) from these places is macerated but not otherwise treated before discharge into the sea close to the beaches. He feels the problem will increase as the Black Isle becomes more of a dormitory suburb of Inverness. As long sea outfalls (1km+) as used in some other areas are not practicable, he suggests that surely some more hygienic and less primitive method of treating Black Isle sewage could be found.

I wonder, could there be a connection between the sewage pollution and dolphins with skin complaints?

Meanwhile back at the loch. In NIS114 I reported that I had seen jet skis and water skiing at the Fort Augustus end of the loch. A letter to the Courier recently reported the following incident. On Saturday July 31st a small crowd on the Fort Augustus Pier watched a 'duel' between a swan and a jet skier. The letter writer said that for 15 minutes the machine buzzed the swan. From time to time the rider fell off and each time the swan flew at the machine, crashing into it heavily, in a desperate attempt to ward it off. The bird was behaving in this manner because it was trying to protect two young cygnets sheltering under her partner's wings a short distance away.

I am left wondering at the mentality of such a person. If I had been there I know I would have made an effort to be there when he returned to shore and he would have been in no doubt what I thought of his behaviour.

NIS AT THE LOCHSIDE

Andreas Trottmann sent a short report. He and his wife, Angela, spent three weeks at the Strone chalet from May 15th to June 5th. Due to quite good weather and loch conditions, they were able to undertake several sonar research trips with their boat 'Witch of the Mist'. They searched mainly the areas between Foyers and Lochend. They also made a sonar trip of five hours, return trip from Urquhart Bay to Loch Dochfour, with two sonar equipped boats (Doug Macfarlane and family with their dingy and Witch of the Mist) on parallel course on May 23rd. Except for a strange sonar reading off the hydro-electric power station at Foyers on May 9th and some very good fish contacts, the results were rather poor. Doug had a very good contact off Strone with his dingy on May 22nd.

Andreas and Angela also visited Mrs Jessie Chisholm twice and were able to video tape an interview about her experiences and adventures with

the unknown big cats. There are indications that the big cats have left the Tomich (this is UP Glen Urquhart) area, for the moment, as they did several times in the Past. An experiment with a sound activated tape recorder, left for 48 hours at a known big cat site, Produced no results as it did last Year. They also visited several new sites of Megalithic Monuments and Pictish Symbol stones in Perthshire and Argyll.

Mans 't Marnette sent word to clear UP a Point or two about his 'wake experiences' of 1992 (NIS112). The Cover is the area of trees around the mouths of the rivers Enrick and Coiltie. He had not known it had a name until Mr Ross (of the chalet) mentioned it. The second wake (the large one, which was surely not caused by a duck) was not actually by the Cover but in mid-bay right between the chalet and Temple Pier. He added that he has always had his reservations about cameras etc. not working at the critical moments but has had it happen to him twice so he is not as sceptical now. He was to be at the chalet for three weeks from August 28th.

Other visitors to the loch. Brian Herring, London, put a note in with his subscription. He goes to the loch to work with the Loch Ness Project and was there from June 26th to 10th July. The weather had been chilly and wet but not bad enough to prevent work from the 'Ecos' on most days.

Murray Barber, Bournemouth, and family were there in a VW camper for a couple of weeks end of May beginning of June. They had reasonable weather for their first trip for six years. Murray was a long standing member of the old LNI and has visited the loch on numerous occasions.

Rita Lauraine-Gould and Arthur Mills, Avebury, were there from Sep 4th to 11th, no further details.

Richard Carter, Huddersfield, had a camping-hunting holiday at the loch with his youngest son in late September. Weather fine during the day but very cold at night (some reference to brass monkeys). Met and had a good chat with Steve Feltham.

Roger Markham, Ipswich, was there in mid-October, the weather was cold and showery. He was based in Drumnadrochit and moved around the loch to watch different areas. He saw Steve but did not stop for a chat. Already planning for next years visit.

If you would like to join forces with other NIS members for a combined hunt, please let me have details of your proposed visit for mention in a Nessletter. If when you get there you would like to know if any others are around, perhaps to have a chat one evening, try calling me at my home number (0388 537359). UP to now I have not been able to achieve this goal, but if members co-operate we could be successful.

EYGONES

The Inverness Courier has a 'From our files' feature, which goes back 50, 100, 125, and 150 years. Here are two items from it. First dated 27.6.1888 - What is called the Orkney Mermaid had caused a further sensation by appearing in her old haunts at Deerness, accompanied by a young one. During the past fortnight both old and young ones have been seen frequently in the vicinity by different people. The young one is of white colour, and swims in the same fashion as the old one, by throwing its arms out in front of the head and bringing them in towards the side. The prevailing opinion amongst naturalists here is that both are seals of a rare kind; but the Deerness people, who have closely watched the old one for three or four summers in succession, declare that it has none of the habits of the 'Sealsh' and has never been seen sunning itself on the rocks, as seals do. Last summer an attempt was made to shoot the strange visitant, causing it to disappear; but this summer no one has tried to molest it.

The reference to taking pot-shots at strange and rare animals brought to mind another item from the same source a little while ago. Two 'gentlemen' were fishing from a boat on Loch Lomond when they saw something unusual in the water. Drawing closer they were amazed to see it was an adder, which was swimming in a determined manner between two of the islands. They were much amused by this and watched it with great interest for some time. Then having had their fill of the sight they whacked it with an oar and brought the body into the boat!!! I suppose they, and the marksman above, would be the forebears of the jet-skier.

The second item I was going to quote comes from the Courier of 8.10.1968. A few days ago a large fish came ashore on the banks of Loch Ness about two miles to the west of Lochend Inn. Neither name or species of the strange visitor could be satisfactorily explained and large crowds of country people went to see and examine it for themselves, but left without being able to determine whether the monster was aquatic, amphibious or terrestrial. Some of the most credulous of the natives averred that a huge fish, similar in size and shape, had been occasionally seen gambolling in the loch for years back, and with equal determination protested that it being cast dead on the shore bode no good to the inhabitants - that, in fact, its presence presaged dire calamities either in pestilence or famine or perhaps both. At last however, an individual better skilled in the science of ichthyology appeared on the scene, and ascertained that the strange visitor was nothing more or less than a bottle-nosed whale about six feet long. How one of the denizens of the ocean came to be cast ashore at Loch Ness was the next question, but this, too, has been set at rest, for it was ascertained that the blubber had been taken off. The fish had, of course, been caught at sea, and had been cast adrift in the waters of Loch Ness by some waggish crew to surprise the primitive inhabitants of Abriachan and surrounding districts. The ruse was eminently successful.

I found this report intriguing with various aspects of interest. The question when was the phenomenon first reported is one that is usually raised by Loch Ness researchers, especially detractors. There are historical reports referred to in the books, but some researchers say they have been unable to locate the actual sources of them. The local newspapers are also cited. It being claimed by some that even after extensive research of old newspaper files they have been unable to find any monster stories prior to the mid-30s. Which they then say supports the argument that the monster is something that was created by the Inverness Courier stories in 1933, and everything since is based on that false premise.

The 1868 report is not of a monster, but a hoax perpetrated by 'some waggish crew'. I think this indicates that 125 years ago it was well known by the inhabitants of Inverness that the people living around the loch thought there was something unusual in it. Because the hoaxers thought it worthwhile to try to catch the locals out and hold them up to ridicule. The phrase 'the primitive inhabitants of Abriachan and surrounding districts' in the report shows the newspaper people were contemptuous of the locals. So it should not be surprising if no resident on the shores of Loch Ness did not rush into town to report seeing the 'Water Horse' again. The report also adds to the doom and tragedy legend that is always associated with the 'Each Uisge'. Here again the reference to the 'more credulous of the natives' illustrates the attitude of the writer. Such attitudes are little changed in some circles even today. In many cases when a sighting is reported there are references to 'whiskey and the tourist trade'. I was also interested in the 'bottle-nosed whale' which indicates that the dolphin population in the Moray Firth has been around a long time.

Some very sad news to finish. I have heard that Bob Rines' wife Carol died earlier this year, sometime in June I understand. She had been in ill health for a number of years. Carol was always associated with the work Bob did at the loch, acting as secretary, keeping records and giving moral support etc. Our sincere condolences go to Bob and their son Justice.

NIS 115 filled, please keep your news and views coming they are always needed and welcome. Subscriptions: our postal authorities have increased charges but worse they have discontinued the lower weight categories for overseas mail. The cost for posting to the U.S.A. has almost doubled. So I will need to ask for \$12.00 for U.S.A., UK will remain £2.75, Europe £3.00. The address remains: R.R. Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St Johns Chapel, Bishop Auckland, DL13 1RQ.

RIP.