

February 2011

1. View of Centre in mid-February



2. Confirmed wildlife sightings:

a. Birds:

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Brambling, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Jay, Kestrel, Lesser Redpoll, Little Grebe, Long-tailed Tit, Mallard, Moorhen, Nuthatch, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Raven, Robin, Siskin, Sparrowhawk, Treecreeper, Willow Tit, Wood Pigeon.

Note the return of the **Little Grebe (*Dabchick*)**. These are diving birds and were forced to leave the reserve on the 2nd of November 2010 when the pond froze over. One of the pair returned at the beginning of February, stayed for a few days and then disappeared again to return with its mate a few days later.

Hopefully they will breed successfully again this year. They build a floating nest among plants growing in shallow water. They lay 4-6 white eggs which gradually become stained and brown. Both sexes incubate the eggs which hatch after 20 days. The down-covered young quickly leave the nest and may be seen riding on the adults' back. They feed on insects and their larvae, water snails and the sticklebacks in the pond.



The small woodland birds at the feeders have to watch out for a sparrowhawk which patrols the area around the Centre. So far it has been too quick to capture on camera.

A pair of buzzards are frequently seen perched on the trees at the diagonally opposite corner of the reserve. Unfortunately, they are just too far away to photograph well without a high quality lens.



b. Mammals:

Bank Vole, Fox, Mole, Rabbit, Roe Deer, Red Squirrel, Stoat, Weasel, Wood Mouse.



During the month, the Bank Vole was frequently seen below one of the bird feeders where it could take advantage of the seeds the birds dropped. It will normally feed on grasses, plants, buds, seeds, tree fruits, fungus, insects, worms and even bark in winter. They are gregarious, run and climb well and build a spherical nest beneath tree roots and clumps of brushwood. They may have 2 – 4 litters a year of 3-7 young.

- c. Amphibians:** A young visitor to the reserve spotted a **palmate newt** lying on the jetty. Unfortunately it was dead and there were no signs to explain how it got there.

Look out for the frogs and toad coming to the pond to spawn in March. The first spawn is normally laid around the 17th of the month.

c. Insects:

A common **7-spot Ladybird** was seen on a fence post in mid-February. This was a very early sighting. Usually they are not seen in any number until April.



On the 18th of the month a moth was spotted on the outside wall of the equipment store. It turned out to be a species that had not been recorded at the reserve before (see below). A total of 113 species of moth have now been identified at the reserve.

Dotted Border *Agriopis marginaria*

Wingspan 27-32 mm.

A common species distributed widely over the British Isles, there are quite a number of variations, including a virtually all-dark form, ab. *fuscata*. The females are flightless, and have only vestigial wings. The moths are out from February to April, when the males can be attracted to light. The species frequents woodland, gardens and bushy places, and the larvae feed on several different deciduous trees.



Insects to look out for next month include the Red-tailed Bumble Bee and the Peacock Butterfly

d. Plant Life:

Some plants are coming out of their winter dormancy. The reed-grass around the pond is beginning sprout new leaves. So too is the honeysuckle in the woodland.

The hazel catkins (male flowers) are growing rapidly and will soon be releasing clouds of minute pollen grains into the wind. The inconspicuous red spikes of the female flowers were also to be seen on some of the hazel bushes, but not all.



3. 20th February - Annual Nut Race



On Sunday 20th February, approximately fifty people of all ages braved the cold weather to support the Annual Nut Race at Eskrigg Nature Reserve (although not all stayed for the photograph). The Trust would like to thank the many people of Lockerbie, and beyond, who sponsored a nut or gave a donation and helped to raise over **£600**. These funds will all be used to further the work of the Trust at the reserve. Thanks are also due to the volunteers who cleared the burn in preparation for the race and Liz McDonnell who donated the prizes. All children who took part received a cream egg. The photographs were taken by Jim Rae (Reserve Manager).



Adults and children lined the burn ready to nudge on any nuts that got stuck at the sides.

The winners of this year's race were as follows:
1st prize of £25 – Red Nut number 12 – sponsored by Jim Geddes
2nd prize of £15 – Yellow Nut number 94 – sponsored by Hewitson.
3rd prize of an Easter Egg – Yellow Nut number 86 – sponsored by John M Smith

4. Development and maintenance:

a. Completion of jetty extension



The facing was completed on 18th February.

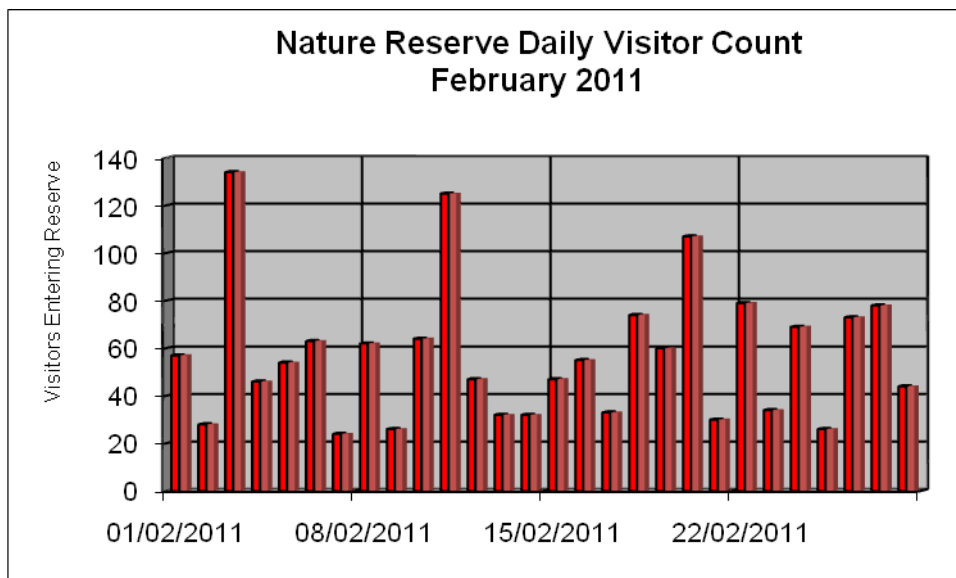


The top was completed on 19th February.

b. On the February maintenance day David Hughes and Calum Harvey replaced several of the boards along the sides of the path.

5. Visitor Records

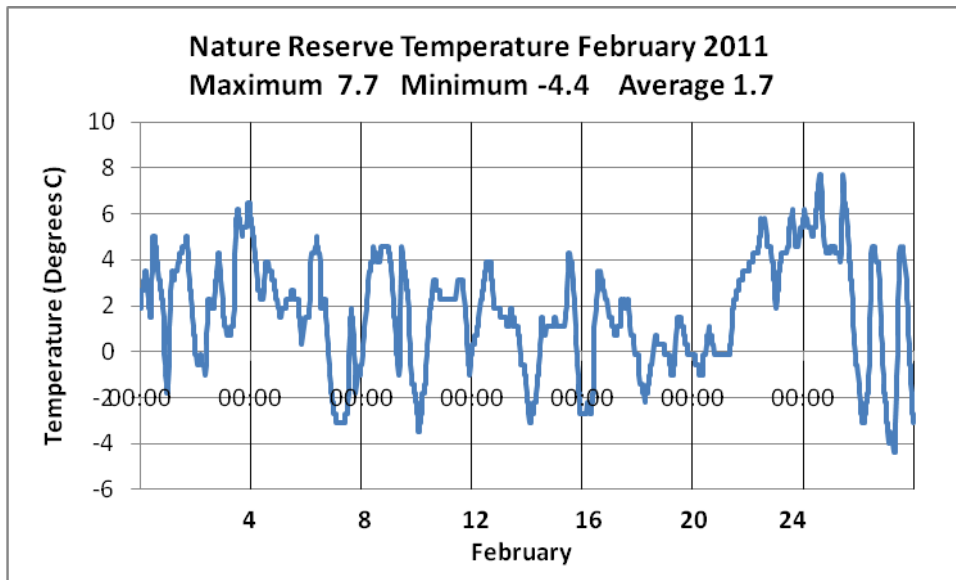
Month	Total number of Visitors	Daily Average Visitors
December	1251	40
January	1472	47
February	1603	57



6. Weather Records

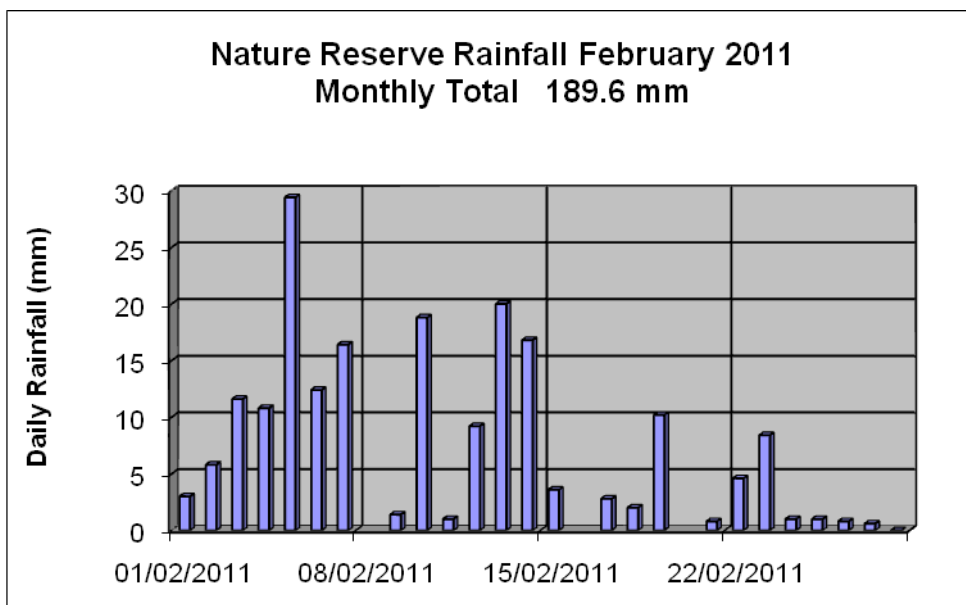
a. Air Temperature

Month	Maximum	Minimum	Average
November	5.4	-8.7	-1.3
December	2.3	-17.6	-6.5
January	5.4	-9.2	-1.5
February	7.7	-4.4	1.7



b. Precipitation

Month	Rainfall (mm)
November	57
December	29.7
January	108.8
February	189.6



**7. Lockerbie Academy activities at reserve:
a. S3 Rural Studies**



Class brought down by Gordon Ferrie in ATI bus.



Pupils helping to raise mid-section of boardwalk.

b. S2 Environmental Studies (10.02.11)



Boys put up camera to monitor squirrel feeder.



Girls look on and look after rest of equipment.

c. S1 Environmental Studies (15.02.11)

The class were studying plant growth.

1. They learned how to measure the height of trees using a short stick and a tape measure.
2. They looked closely at the trees to identify the flowers that appear before the leaves.



Jamie McCormick was first to spot the tiny, red, female flowers of the hazel growing near the much larger male flowers known as catkins. The tiny pollen grains produced by the catkins are blown by the wind. If any land on the female flowers the flowers will be fertilised and gradually the fruit, a hazel nut, will begin to develop. We will look for the ripe hazel nuts in the autumn.

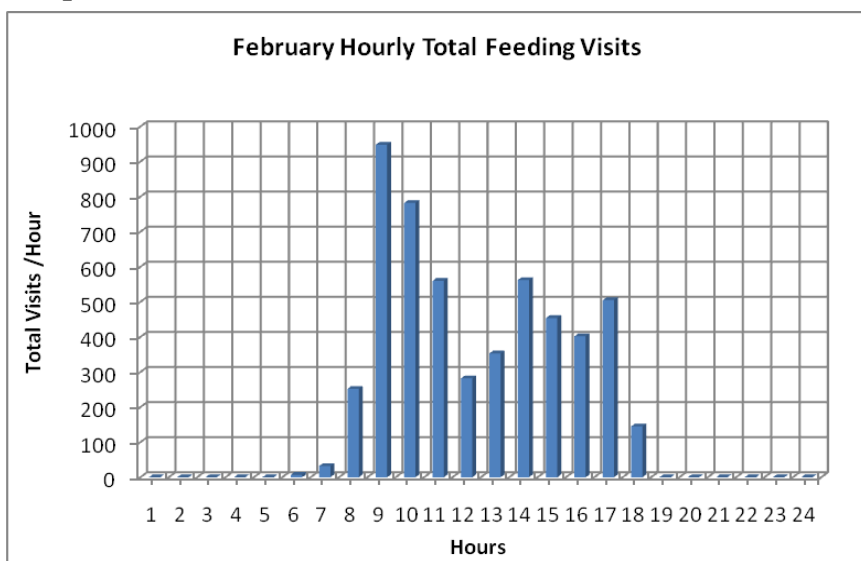


8. Monitoring Red Squirrel Feeding Behaviour



With a great deal of help from John Riddick, a system has been set up to monitor the feeding pattern of the red squirrels at Eskrigg Reserve. An electronic counter has been attached to the main squirrel feeder and connected to a battery powered data storage unit. Each time a squirrel opens the lid of the feeder to collect a peanut the counter is triggered. A laptop is connected to the data storage unit at regular intervals and the data retrieved. The data is then transferred to a spreadsheet and displayed in graphic form.

Graph 1 – Total number of visits made to the feeder each hour of the day during February.

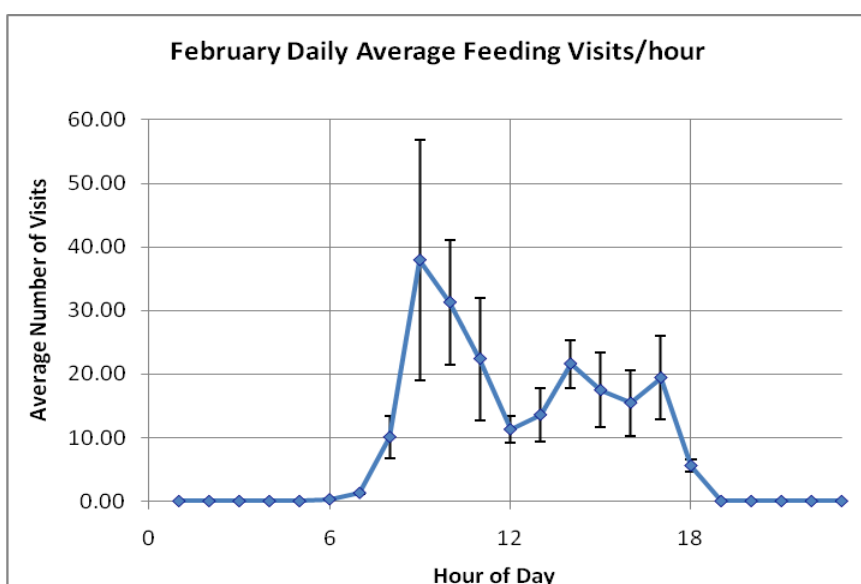


Note the three peak feeding times:

- between 9 am & 11 am
- around 2 pm and
- around 5 pm

It will be interesting to note if these peaks are sustained throughout the year or if they alter with the changing hours of daylight (photoperiod).

Graph 2 – The average number of visits per hour during February.



The vertical lines on the graph indicate the standard deviations from the means for each hour.

Note the greatest deviation takes place around 9 am. This may be due to the fact that the bird and squirrel feeders were often topped up around 9 am and the squirrels' normal feeding pattern may have been disrupted as a result.

It will be interesting to see if there are any changes when the Centre opening times change to the summer hours and the feeders are topped up an hour earlier each day. It might also be worth noting the timing of sunrise and sunset in future months.