

St Abbs in the Summer

On Wednesday 13th May Kevin Rideout, the National Trust for Scotland's Ranger at St Abb's Head Reserve, gave a very interesting talk to the group about what they might see there in the summer. The talk was illustrated with Kevin's excellent slides.

He is himself a sea-bird enthusiast and finds that the bird colony here is the most accessible one on mainland Britain. In 2008 there were 33 000 guillemots and about one twentieth of that number of razorbills. Both species, along with other sea-birds, are suffering from a drop in the number of the sandeels on which they feed their young. Kittiwake numbers have also fallen and puffins are suffering too, although there are not many of these at St Abbs.

The underlying rocks at St Abbs are igneous, containing heavy metals, and the grasslands on the headland grow on a thin, calcareous soil, giving a variety of different wild flowers, including spring sandwort, rose root and meadow saxifrage. These provide nectar for butterflies such as small copper and grayling. Dark green fritillaries are sometimes seen and rock roses support a population of the northern brown argus, whose caterpillars feed only on the leaves of this plant.

The reserve is perhaps less well known for its cetacean sightings. In 2008 bottle-nosed, white-sided and Risso's dolphins were all seen, as was a minke whale. In February 2009, a hump-backed whale was sighted off St Abb's harbour.

All in all, it was a talk to inspire the members to visit the reserve, sure of plenty to see.

Molly, May 2009