Young Birders' Training Course: Investing in the future of wild bird conservation

Friday 4 April, 2014

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) has joined forces with the country's oldest bird observatory, the Isle of May Bird Observatory (IoMBO), in an exciting new partnership project that will offer six young birdwatchers the chance to participate in a week-long sponsored training course, run by the SOC and the IoMBO, on the Isle of May this July.

Open to individuals aged 16–25 years, the Young Birders' Training Course will provide an opportunity for successful applicants to gain invaluable first-hand practical experience of a wide range of bird survey skills and techniques. This will include a thorough introduction to the practice of recording birds and other wildlife, experience of species counts, monitoring, ringing, trapping, ageing and sexing birds, as well as the chance to participate in activities such as visible migration watches and co-ordinated sea-watching counts. Outwith the scope of most university curricula, these skills are essential attributes for those embarking on a career or role in wildlife recording, surveying and conservation.

Chris McInerny, President of the SOC:
"The SOC, along with the IoMBO, is delighted to be sponsoring this course for young birdwatchers, as both our organisations are committed to encouraging young people with an interest in birds and natural history to acquire skills and experience that will deepen their knowledge and be useful for future study and work in this area. The Isle of May is a beautiful place and the refurbished Observatory will make for excellent lodgings. However, the type of person who will get the most of this course will be the hardy, keen, outdoor type who can survive being separated from hair straighteners and mobile phones! We are grateful to legacies and generous donations to the Club, which have allowed us to fund this exciting project."

Stuart Rivers, IoMBO Trust:
"Following on from the recent redevelopment of the accommodation, the hosting of training courses is one of the next steps in the future direction for the Observatory. We are able to draw on the talents of highly experienced bird ringers, researchers and surveyors to pass on their skills and expertise to a new generation of keen young individuals. This course will not only provide a platform for participants to pursue a future in wildlife monitoring and conservation, but a network of contacts to assist them on their journey."

The Isle of May, which lies five miles off the Fife coast, nestled in the mouth of the Firth of Forth, is a fitting backdrop for the course. The island is one of Scotland's National Nature Reserves, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and protected by European and National legislation because of its internationally and nationally important seabird and Grey Seal colonies.

The lucky participants will have the chance to find out more about the island's rich cultural history and to sample bird observatory life, with accommodation for the duration of their stay being provided within the recently refurbished 'Low Light', a former lighthouse.

As part of the grant awards process and applicants' skills development training, the group will collectively design and deliver a short presentation on their island experience at the SOC's 2014 Annual Conference, to be held in Perth in late October and which will be attended by representatives from various partner organisations.

Application form for the course can be downloaded from the SOC website or obtained by emailing jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk or posted to: Jane Cleaver (Confidential), SOC, Waterston House, Aberlady, EH32 0PY.

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IMAGES:
Image: Puffin. Image credit: Marta Franco Popovics
Image: The Low Light, Isle of May. Image credit: Calum Scott

For more information/interviews/images, please contact:
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Young :: Birdwatchers :: Training :: Week :: Funded :: Soc :: Isle Of May :: Bird Observatory ::

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NOTES:
Contributing organisations: The course will be carried out under the expert tuition of representatives from the SOC and IOMBO, with additional support and resources provided by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) staff on the island. Please see website for full details.

Funding: The course is being funded by the SOC, made possible by generous individuals who have left legacies to the Club.
Minimum criteria to be awarded a place on the course: Candidates must be aged between 16 and 25 years of age on the day of trip departure (written permission will be required from a parent or guardian if under 18 years of age) and must be available for the full duration of the course (Saturday 5th July – Saturday 12th July 2014). Successful applicants must be able to make their own way to and from Anstruther, Fife, and make a personal contribution of £25 (towards food & drink supplies). Applicants seeking support to fund their travel costs to Anstruther should research funding support. For example: http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/taking-part/young-bird-obs-volunteer-fund
About the SOC:
On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with a network of 15 branches throughout Scotland and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other hand, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data that the SOC collects are made available to conservationists, planners and developers and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning. Club Headquarters are located in East Lothian, in the village of Aberlady, overlooking the nearby local nature reserve.

For more information on the Club, please contact jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk or visit www.the-soc.org.uk

About the Isle of May Bird Observatory:
The Isle of May Bird Observatory is Scotland's oldest bird observatory, founded in 1934. The observatory is administered by a charitable trust (The Isle of May Bird Observatory and Field Station Trust) and manned by volunteer observers between March and November. The Observatory was founded by a group of young Scottish ornithologists and has continued to depend on the enthusiasm of amateurs who come to the island, usually for a week at a time, to maintain observations. The living accommodation is housed within the Low Light, a former navigational lighthouse.
See:http://www.isleofmaybirdobs.org/ for more information

About the Isle of May: The Isle of May lies five miles off the Fife coast of Scotland. It is a National Nature Reserve, recognised for its national and internationally important seabird and Grey Seal colonies and is protected by European and National legislation.

It is included in the European network of Natura 2000 sites as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for ten bird species and is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for breeding grey seals and rocky reefs. A number of the SPA bird species are also protected under national legislation (Site of Special Scientific Interest), as are two additional bird species. More information on the Isle of May National Nature Reserve and how it is managed can be found here: http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/nnr/The_Story_of_the_Isle_of_May_National_Nature_Reserve.pdf

Company Contact: