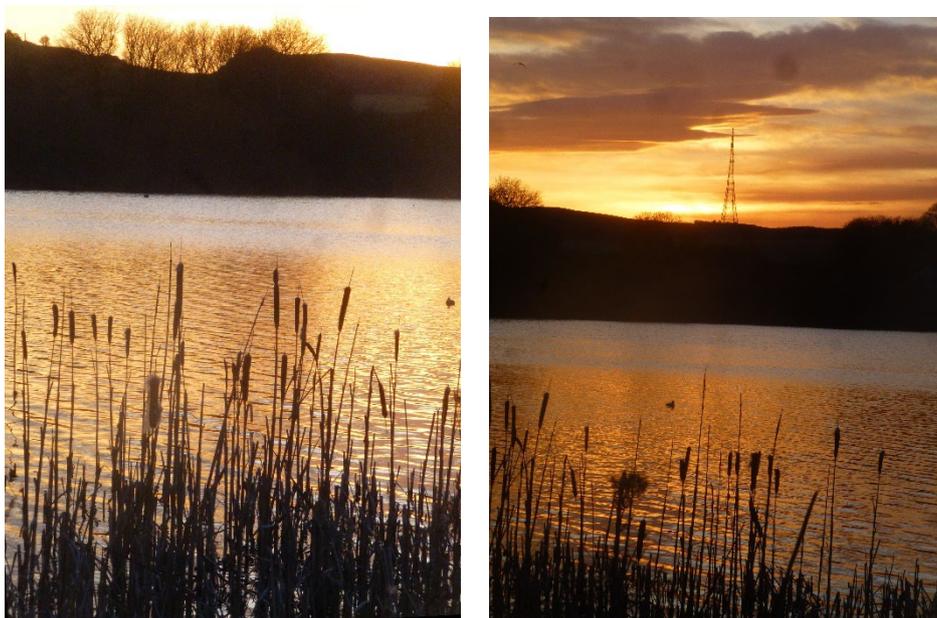


KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2021

Hello! My name is Robert Mill and I have just started volunteering at The Ecology Centre after my wife and I moved to Kinghorn from Edinburgh in the middle of March. In Edinburgh I worked as a research botanist at the Royal Botanic Garden, where I also kept its wildlife records from 2004 until lockdown began in March last year, and from 2014-2020 I also posted a monthly wildlife report on its Botanic Stories website. My role at TEC will be similar - recording the biodiversity (plants and wildlife) of the Loch, particularly the areas owned or managed by TEC, and submitting monthly reports for publishing on the TEC website. This is the first of these, and covers the period since we moved to Kinghorn on 18 March plus a short visit to Loch on 27 February. The Ecology Centre are keen that I mention observations made elsewhere in the village too, so I have also included some sightings down on the beach and coastal path, so interesting reports from February and March from them are also included.

AROUND THE LOCH



Two views of the Loch looking west, with the Binn transmitter in the background in the right-hand picture. Photos Robert Mill on the evening of our arrival, 18 March 2021.

Birds Before I arrived in Kinghorn I was aware from the TEC website that a **Ring-Necked Duck** had been wintering on Kinghorn Loch from December onwards. The most recent date I have for it being on the Loch is 27th March [“Waxwing Eco-tourism” website], when it’s quite likely that I saw it myself without being aware of it, when watching the Tufted Ducks on my visit that day! **Pochards**, which were also reported on the TEC website as wintering on the Loch, were seen on 27 February but not on any of my March visits. Also on 27 February, a **Grey Wagtail** was near the sluice, but I did not see it in March. March brought the first of the spring migrants, with a **Chiffchaff** singing in the vicinity of the Life Labyrinth on 22nd (my first 2021 record) and 30th. **Dabchick** was seen and/or heard ‘whinnying’ on four dates from 18 March as well as on 27 February, while a juvenile **Cormorant** was present on 20th March with two adults and a juvenile seen on 30th. A **Tawny Owl** was heard hooting by day near the bird hide on 22nd, behaviour familiar to me from my time at the Royal Botanic Garden where its resident owl often hooted in daylight. **Skylarks** were singing above the Loch on 25th and 30th while a **Yellowhammer** was feeding by the Loch edge in front of the boathouses (18th). The full list of birds

recorded at the Loch from 27 February to 31 March is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Common Gull, Coot, Cormorant, Dabchick, Dunnock, Farmyard geese hybrids, Goldfinch, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Greylag Goose, Grey Wagtail (27 Feb only), Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pochard (27 Feb only), Ring-necked Duck, Robin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Tawny Owl, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

Invertebrates, 'Minibeasts' and Fish

The only **bee** recorded at the Loch in March was a **Buff-tailed Bumblebee** on 30th which was also the only land invertebrate seen during the second half of the month, which was often chilly and not conducive to them being active. However, I briefly joined Fraser doing pond dipping with a few children on 30th, when we recorded **Ramshorn Snail** and **Lesser Water Boatman** as well as a **Minnow** and unidentified species of **leech, caddisfly larva** and **damselfly nymph**.

IN AND AROUND THE VILLAGE

A **Buzzard** was soaring above the road to the Kissing Trees on 23rd while a **Kestrel** was hovering over rough ground adjoining the southern edge of the Lochside Grange development on 30th. **Collared Doves** and **Starlings** were singing in the village. A **Small Tortoiseshell butterfly** flew past the front wall of our new house in Lochside Grange on 19th. **Pink-footed Geese** (around 60) were in fields by the track from Red Path Brae to Craigenalt Cottage on 23rd.

The beautiful little flowers of **Slender Speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*)** were flowering at the edge of the golf course below the Burnside Path, as well as **Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria vulgaris*)**.



Left: Slender Speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*). **Right:** Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria vulgaris*). Both photographed 30 March 2021 by Robert Mill.

DOWN ON THE BEACH AND COASTAL PATH

Around 200 **Eiders** were off Pettycur Bay on 20 February. A **Gannet** was seen plunge-diving into the sea off the coastal path on 21st.



Left: Alexanders (*Smyrniolus atrum*), 24 March 2021. **Right:** Alexanders rust (*Puccinia smyrnii*), 30 March 2021. Photos Robert Mill.

Along the coastal path from the caravans eastwards is probably the most interesting plant I've seen since coming to Kinghorn -- **Alexanders (*Smyrniolus atrum*)**. This member of the carrot family is named, not after King Alexander III of Scotland who died very close to Kinghorn on 19 March 1286, but after another Alexander III -- Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great. Apparently, it was a favourite herb in Alexander the Great's time. It's a former medicinal and culinary herb, introduced to Britain for those uses, and the earliest Scottish records were at Ravenscraig Castle near Kirkcaldy, and at Kinghorn! On some of the plants can be found the rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii*, the first Scottish record of which was made somewhere in Fife in 1985; I found this rust on several Alexanders plants, particularly the ones nearest or even in the village, such as one under a flowering currant bush on St Leonard's Path. The rust's only known hosts are Alexanders and other members of the genus *Smyrniolus* that don't grow in Britain except maybe as cultivated plants in botanical gardens and the like.

Another coastal plant in flower in March and April is **Common Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*)** which as its name implies was used as a cure for scurvy, being full of vitamin C. It isn't a grass but belongs to the cabbage family. Also found along the coastal path were some very unseasonably early flowers of Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) which may instead have been flowering all through the winter.



Left: Common Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), 21 March 2021. **Right:** Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), 24 March 2021. Photos Robert Mill.

Down on the beach at Pettycur Bay a **King Ragworm (*Alitta virens*)** was moving across the sand on 26th March. This is a very distinctive large worm, deep green in colour.



King Ragworm (*Alitta virens*), Pettycur Bay, 26 March 2021. Photo Robert Mill.