

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - APRIL 2021

April 2021 was notable for being exceptionally dry and very sunny but also for the unusually high number of night frosts and the predominantly cool to decidedly chilly daytime temperatures. All this was due to high pressure dominating the weather virtually all month, with winds coming mostly from the Arctic. This had an effect on the wildlife -- birdsong was less, plants started flowering later than usual, and insects were neither very numerous nor very active.

AROUND THE LOCH



Tufted Ducks (Aythya fuligula), 9 April 2021. Photo Andy Pay.

Birds Fifty-one bird species were recorded at the Loch during April. Despite the cool weather and unfavourable winds, some migrants did arrive! A few more **Chiffchaffs**, the first of which had come back in March, arrived while **Willow Warblers** began returning from 10th with at least three singing from 18th. A male **Blackcap** was seen beside the marshy area near the hide on 2nd while the first singing one was heard on 13th; by the end of the month at least three had territories. Three or four **Sand Martins** were feeding over the Loch on 11th and 14th and one was also seen on 25th, while a couple of **Swallows** were present on 28th. **Waterfowl**, however, decreased in both numbers and diversity. The **Ring-necked Duck** that had been present during the winter months was not seen during April while the **Tufted Duck** flock, that had been more than 200 at one point during winter, was reduced to just a few by 25th and none at all were seen on my last visit (28th). However, a **Shelduck** on 14th (N. Voaden) was a notable record for the Loch. **Dabchick (Little Grebe)** were only recorded on 1st and sadly are assumed to have deserted the Loch thereafter due to some sort of disturbance. Their larger cousin the **Great Crested Grebe** was seen on at least eight dates throughout the month; two birds, presumably a pair, were displaying or bringing nesting material in the first half of the month. However, on 28th only one was present, which was heard calling, possibly trying to find its missing mate. Again, it is possible that the other bird may have deserted the loch -- only time will tell. At least one **Buzzard** was over the Loch on five dates while a **Kestrel** was recorded on 14th by N. Voaden. Notable smaller birds included a few **Common Crossbills** near the fishermen's gate on 2nd, a **Treecreeper** on 10th and **Yellowhammer** on 14th (N. Voaden) and 16th. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during April is: *Blackbird, Blackcap, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion*

Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Common Crossbill, Common Gull, Common Kestrel, Common Shelduck, Common Starling, Coot, Cormorant, Dabchick, Dunnock, Farmyard geese hybrids, Feral Pigeon, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Linnet, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Robin, Sand Martin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Swallow, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Willow Warbler, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.

Mammals A **Grey Squirrel** was near the bird hide on 10th and 13th while a **Brown Rat** was beautifully photographed at the Loch on 13th (Maxine Stewart, Kinghorn Photos).

Invertebrates and 'minibeasts'



Left: Several Common Pollen Beetles (*Meligethes aeneus*) in Coltsfoot flower, 16 April 2021.
Right: millipede *Brachydesmus superus*, 18 April 2021. Both photos Robert Mill.

The only **butterfly** recorded during my visits to the Loch in April was a **Small Tortoiseshell** on 21st. **Buff-tailed Bumblebee** was seen throughout the month while **Common Carder Bee** was recorded from 12th onwards and a **Large Red Bumblebee** was seen on 25th. A **Common Wasp** was visiting Field Maple flowers on 13th while a small, as yet unidentified **ant** species was present under the carpet mats on several occasions. A **Common Drone Fly** was near the site of the Earthship on 12th and another unidentified hoverfly, possibly a species of *Cheilosia* or *Erastilinus*, was on dandelion on 28th. The **bluebottle** *Calliphora vicina* and another fly, *Phaonia tuguriorum*, were both basking on the same tree trunk near the bird hide on 21st. **Common Pollen Beetles (*Meligethes aeneus*)** were in coltsfoot flowers (13th to 21st) while a **ground beetle**, possibly a **Common Black Clock (*Pterostichus madidus*)**, was under the carpet mats on 28th but ran away very fast before a photograph could be taken in an attempt to identify it. Also under the carpet mats, **Common Striped Woodlouse (*Philoscia muscorum*)**, a **millipede** identified as *Brachydesmus superus*, and various colour forms of the very variable **Great Black Slug (*Arion ater* aggregate)** were all seen on 18th and all had not previously recorded from the Loch, while **White-legged Snake Millipede (*Tachypodoiulus niger*)** and the common **earthworm *Lumbricus terrestris*** were present there on 25th and 28th.

IN AND AROUND THE VILLAGE

Around 200 **Eiders** were off Pettycur Bay on 7th, as well as almost 30 **Red-breasted Mergansers**. The latter were doing 'synchronised diving', with all the birds diving at the same time, and also surfacing together. A **Shag** was close inshore off the car park at Pettycur the same day. At least 12

Yellowhammers were in the ploughed field next to the Burnside Path on 1st, with smaller numbers seen there throughout the rest the month. **Linnets** were present there on several occasions (also from 1st), and one male **Reed Bunting** on 21st.

Small Tortoiseshell and **Peacock** butterflies were both seen on the Burnside Path on 21st. Unusually, they were flying very close together in the same way that courting butterfly pairs do -- but these are different species, although they do both belong to the same family of butterflies (the vanessids). Their separate identities were confirmed when they both settled on a mound of bark chippings to bask in the sunshine.

DOWN ON THE BEACH AND COASTAL PATH



A Sei Whale (Balaenoptera borealis) like the one seen at Kinghorn, photographed off the coast of Patagonia by Katie McConnell. From Español-Jiménez et al., Ocean Science 15: 75–82 (2019). Used, slightly cropped, under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

By far the biggest news of the month was the **Sei Whale (Balaenoptera borealis)** which was seen off Kinghorn in April by a few lucky people. It was first recorded on 10 April and quickly made the national newspapers because of its extreme rarity in inland coastal waters -- it normally lives far offshore and it is very unusual to see it in estuaries like the Forth, far less to see it less than 20 metres from the shore as some observers did! It was also off Kinghorn on 14th, 24th and 25th (Sea Watch Foundation website) and went upriver as far as South Queensferry on 11th.

Harbour Seals were on rocks just off the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower on the outskirts of Kirkcaldy on 22nd.

Around 8-10 **Fulmars** were on the cliffs at the west end of the beach in the village. There was 'billing and cooing' in the first part of the month but by the month's end most birds were as singles, presumably incubating eggs. A **Sandwich Tern** was calling off Pettycur Bay on 17th, the first I've heard this year. It will have returned from spending winter somewhere off west Africa such as Angola or Namibia. Another was off Kinghorn beach on 20th.

Orange Tip and **Speckled Wood butterflies** were both seen by the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower on 22nd while the masses of blackthorn bushes along that stretch of the Fife Coastal Path were a magnet for **Buff-tailed Bumblebees**.

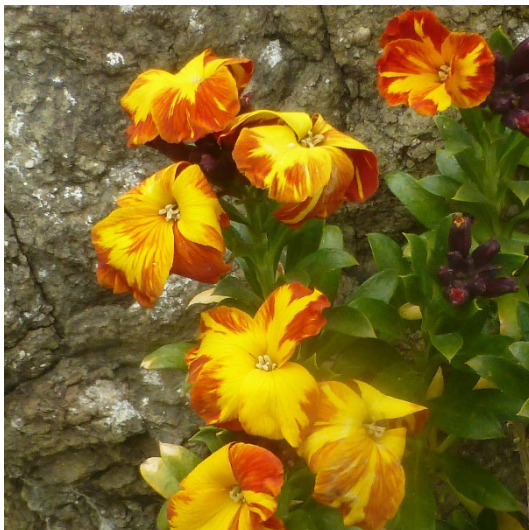
A **Beadlet Anemone** was found in a rock pool at the west end of Kinghorn beach on 20th. There are two colour forms (red and green); the one found was dark red. Shells of **Baltic Tellin** and **Pullet Carpet**

Shell were found on the beach at Pettycur on 7th, with **Edible Periwinkles** on the rocks at both Kinghorn and Pettycur (7th, 20th).



*Left: Baltic Tellin (*Maconia balthica*), 7 April 2021. Right: Edible Periwinkles (*Littorina littorea*), 20 April 2021. Both photos taken at Pettycur Bay by Robert Mill.*

The cliffs at Pettycur Bay were a mass of orange and yellow during April, having been colonised by **Wallflower**. Although Wallflower is a British native, the flowers of the Pettycur plants are a mixture of reddish-orange and yellow, with many plants having variegated flowers. This suggests they may have been of garden origin and indeed some in a garden opposite the Primary School are identical to the ones on the cliffs! However, the plants have now become thoroughly naturalized. At the zigzag on the coastal path about midway between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower I noticed a plant with tiny pale blue flowers growing in a crevice between stones. At first, I thought it was a very dwarfed forget-me-not, but on closer examination of my photos by myself and Sandy Edwards (BSBI plant recorder for Fife) it was identified as **Cornsalad (*Valerianella* sp.)** -- I will have to wait until it fruits before I can find out the exact species as there are two very similar ones that cannot be distinguished by their flowers.



*Left: Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*), Pettycur Bay, 7 April 2021. Right: Cornsalad (*Valerianella* sp.), coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower, 29 April 2021; inset shows detail of flowers. All three photos Robert Mill.*