

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2022



SIGN OF SPRING: Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) in flower at the Loch, 30 March 2022. Photo Robert Mill.

In marked contrast to February, March 2022 was a pretty calm month. A large area of high pressure dominated the weather of the UK, and often much of Europe, during most of the month, bringing lots of sunshine, mild or very mild temperatures and little rain. However, the very start and very end of the month were more unsettled and also noticeably colder. The very chilly weather at the end of the month was in stark contrast to the well above average temperatures of just a day or two before – one day we were basking in the sunshine in short sleeves, the next it was back to woolly jumpers and fleeces, with snow grains falling in Kinghorn! The Met Office (Met Office, 2022) reported that Scotland as a whole had its sunniest March on record (since 1919), with 64% more sunshine hours than average. Rainfall in Scotland was only half the normal average.

All this good weather meant that I was able to get out and about most days, and I made nine visits to the Loch during the month. These resulted in 26 additional new records, bringing the cumulative total for the site up from 1,275 on 28 February to **1,301** on 31 March; as usual, some things have not yet been identified. The new records comprised 1 additional bird species (possibly two, as noted later), 1 snail, 1 terrestrial alga, 6 fungi (3 of them lichenicolous), 7 lichens, 1 fern and 9 flowering plants or trees.

AROUND THE LOCH

Birds: During March a very good total of at least 56, possibly 57, different bird species were recorded at the Loch or in its immediate vicinity. There was one definite new record: **Nuthatch**, which I heard calling near the hide on 29th. Fraser Nicol (TEC) told me that he has heard them regularly over at least the past year in various spots, particularly the woodland near the hide and in the mixed larch plantation near The Ecology Centre, but the species had not previously found its way on to the Loch list. Fraser also told me of a possible sighting of a **Red Kite** over the Rodanbraes opposite the tree swing (24th), which would be a second new Loch record but its identity remains unconfirmed. Migrants came and left: the first **Chiffchaff** of spring was heard singing on 11th and numbers gradually built up to at least four singing males in various spots around the Loch by the

month's end, with another in the Gallowhill Plantation on the opposite side of the B923 on 29th. No **Fieldfares** or **Redwings** were seen, however, and are assumed to have gone back to Scandinavia to breed. **Dabchick (Little Grebe)** numbers also decreased throughout the month until by its end there appeared to be just one left; however, one **Great Crested Grebe** appeared on 8th and a second on 9th, but one of them disappeared again so that for the rest of the month there was only the one, which was sometimes heard calling. Significant numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** were in the vicinity of the Loch, with 250 seen on 4th by myself, a skein of 55 by myself on 7th and no fewer than 350 on 21st by Paul Williams. Four **Tufted Ducks** on 14th (Paul Williams) was the only record for that species but two drake **Common Pochard** frequented the Loch, particularly its southern shore, from 10th–21st at least. At least one **Goldeneye** was also on the Loch most, if not all, of the month. Fewer **Coot** were on the Loch than in February and there were usually only very small numbers of **Cormorants**. There were two sightings of **Grey Heron** (6th and 7th). **Curlew** was reported on three dates and **Oystercatcher** once. **Birds of prey** included two records of **Common Buzzard** (26th, Pauline Bell, Kinghorn Loch Wildlife Group [KLWG] Facebook page; 29th over the willow carr, seen by myself) and one of **Common Kestrel** (22nd, Paul Williams) but none of **Sparrowhawk**. **Jay** was reported from near the hide on four dates, with two seen on 13th by Tim Nicholson (KLWG). **Yellowhammer** was recorded on six dates and Paul Williams saw a **Reed Bunting** on 29th. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during March 2022 is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Common Buzzard, Common Goldeneye, Common Gull, Common Kestrel, Common Magpie, Common Pheasant (Ring-necked), Common Pochard, Common Starling, Coot, Curlew, Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Goldfinch, Great Cormorant, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw (Eurasian), Jay (Eurasian), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Grebe or Dabchick, Long-tailed Tit, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Nuthatch (new Loch record), Oystercatcher, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Reed Bunting, Robin, Shelduck, Skylark, Song Thrush, Tawny Owl, Tree Sparrow, Treecreeper (Eurasian), Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer* and possibly *Red Kite*.

Mammals and amphibians: There were three more records in March of three or four **Roe Deer** near the Rodanbraes track (6th, 18th and 22nd). Fraser Nicol (TEC) mentioned to me that an unusual **grey Stoat** had been seen around the Centre recently. Paul Williams saw **Brown Hares** on 15th and 22nd while **Grey Squirrels** were by the bird feeders at the hides on several dates. **Mole** hills were again evident in the first half of the month in various places around the Loch but later in the month there seemed to be no fresh ones. Paul Bird (KLWG) saw a **Common Toad** on 27th but again no frogspawn was noticed.

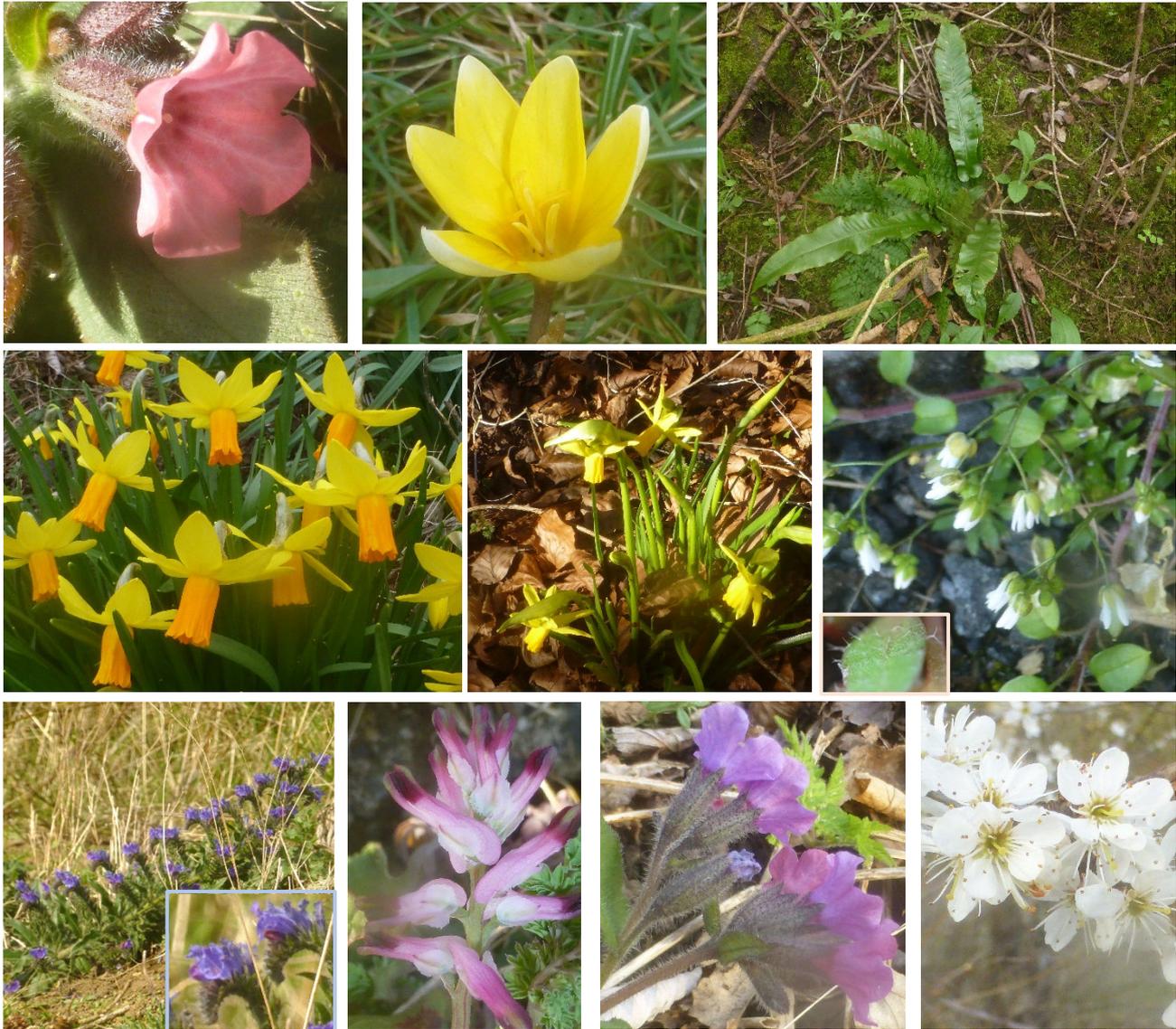


Invertebrates, Kinghorn Loch, March 2022. *Left:* Mine of Golden Pigmy moth (*Stigmella aurella*) on bramble leaf, 22nd. *Centre and right:* Striped (Banded) Snail (*Ceruella virgata*), 22nd. New Loch record. Photos Robert Mill.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): Given the good, sunny and often warm weather for much of March, invertebrate records were fewer than might have been expected. The only **butterflies** were a **Small Tortoiseshell** on 22nd (Paul Williams) and a **Peacock** on 27th (Tim Nicholson), while the only **moth** records were

of the leaf mines of **Golden Pigmy (*Stigmella aurella*)** on bramble leaves in two different parts of the Loch on 22nd and 25th. Queen **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** were out hunting for suitable nest sites from 17th and were the only **bees** noticed. **Seven-spot Ladybirds** were found on three dates (7th and 29th by myself, 22nd by Paul Williams) while the leaf mine of the **Holly Leaf Miner** was the only identified **fly** although two other fly species were seen basking on tree bark. Numerous **Striped (Banded) Snails (*Ceruella virgata*;** new Loch record) were on the verge by the TEC access road on 22nd. On 13th, I found the same unidentified **earthworm** with luminous green spots as I photographed on 25 February (see last month's report).

Flowering plants and ferns



Loch plant records, March 2022. TOP ROW. Left: Red Lungwort (*Pulmonaria rubra*), 1st. New Loch record. **Centre:** Yellow Crocus (*Crocus chrysanthus* cultivar), 1st. New Loch record. **Right:** Harts-tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), 29th. New Loch record. **MIDDLE ROW. Left and centre:** Cultivars of *Narcissus* (Cyclamineus group) resembling 'Jetfire' (left; 13th, new Loch record) and 'Tête à Tête' (centre; 13th, new Loch record in February 2022). **Right:** Glabrous Whitlow-grass (*Erophila glabrescens*), 21st (inset, leaf very close-up, 1 April showing few hairs, all of them forked). New Loch record. **BOTTOM ROW. Far left:** Large inflorescence of Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*), 22nd (inset, flowers close up). **Near left:** Common Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis* subsp. *boraiei*), 22nd. **Near right:** Common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*), 22nd. **Far right:** Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), 22nd. All photos Robert Mill.

Fifty-six species of flowering plant, tree and fern were recorded around the Loch during March, with 10 of them being new Loch records. These included one new **fern**: a single plant of **Hart's-**

tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*) on a shady bank near the path at the north end of the marsh on 29th. Near the Nordmann Fir (*Abies nordmanniana*) identified last month is another conifer, a young **Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*)** which, though obviously planted like the Nordmann Fir, is another new Loch record. Other previously unrecorded species that have been either deliberately planted or accidentally introduced included **Red Lungwort (*Pulmonaria rubra*)** at the entrance to the site (1st onwards), **Yellow Crocus (*Crocus chrysanthus*)** cultivars (1st onwards), ***Narcissus* (Cyclamineus group)** resembling the cultivar 'Jetfire' (13th onwards), and **Glory-of-the-Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*)** and **Siberian Squill (*Scilla siberica*)** both on 21st. New records of native wild plants were **Glabrous Whitlow-grass (*Erophila glabrescens*)** (21st, identity confirmed by macrophotography of the leaf and stem hairs on 1 April) and **Ivy-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*)** on 7th and 25th. The final new Loch flowering plant record, of **Rape (*Brassica napus*)** on the top of the jetty wall, was presumably also self-sown. Most of the species I noted in flower last month were also found flowering in March although **snowdrops** were practically finished by the month's end. Others noted for the first time this year included **Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)** from 7th, **Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)**, **Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)**, **Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)**, **Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale* agg.)**, **Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*)** and **Common Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis* subsp. *boraei*)** all from 13th, **Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)** from 20th, **Dove's-foot Cranesbill (*Geranium molle*)** from 21st, **Common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*)** from 22nd, **Cowslip (*Primula veris*)** from 25th and **Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)**, **Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*)**, **Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)** and 'pussy willows' (*Salix* sp., either Grey Willow *S. cinerea* or Goat Willow *S. caprea*) all from 29th. Some more species that had obviously continued flowering throughout the winter were also found, the most noteworthy being a massive spike of **Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*)** on 22nd.

Fungi, lichens, algae and bryophytes



Pixies, elves and a trumpet fanfare – March mosses, fungi, algae and lichens. TOP ROW. Left: Pixie Cups lichen (*Cladonia pyxidata*), 25th. **Centre:** Elf Cup fungus (*Sarcoscypha* sp.), 29th. **Right:** Fanfare of Trumpets lichen (*Ramalina fastigiata*), 21st. **BOTTOM ROW. Left:** Map Lichen (*Rhizocarpon geographicum*) with black spots and patches of *Muellerella pygmaea* (lichenicolous fungus), 21st. **Centre:** *Boeremia hedericola* leaf spot on Ivy, 21st. **Right:** *Usnea subfloridana*, 29th. All new Loch records. All photos Robert Mill.

Four **bryophytes** were recorded during March. Three of them had already been found earlier in the year but the **liverwort, Bluish Veilwort (*Metzgeria fruticulosa*, 25th)** was another find that confirmed one of the 2018 BioBlitz records. Of the nine **fungi** recorded during March, the most spectacular was an **Elf Cup** species (*Sarcoscypha* sp.), either the Ruby Elf Cup (*Sarcoscypha coccinea*) or the Scarlet Elf Cup (*S. austriaca*), at the base of old willows in the ancient willow carr near the marsh at the head of the Loch on 29th. Microscopic examination is needed to separate them but, whichever was found, it was one of six new fungal records for the Loch. The other five were a leaf spot on Ivy known scientifically as *Boeremia hedericola* (21st), a mildew (*Erysiphe aquilegiae*, most likely its variety *ranunculi*, given the host) on buttercup leaves (22nd and again on 29th), and three minute fungi that parasitise lichens: *Erythricium aurantiacum*, which appears as pink spots on lichens of the genus *Physcia* (21st), *Muellerella pygmaea* which forms black spots and patches on the Map Lichen (*Rhizocarpon geographicum*) and *Xanthoriicola physciae* causing dark discoloration of the fruiting bodies on the orange lichen *Xanthoria parietina* (22nd). Four lichenicolous fungi are now known from around the Loch. Finally, 19 different lichen species were recorded during the month. Seven were new records, comprising **Fanfare of Trumpets (*Ramalina fastigiata*)** on a tree on the Red Path Brae Path connecting the Craigencaft Farm road with Red Path Brae (21st, with fruiting bodies resembling trumpets); another species of the same genus, *Ramalina farinacea*, as well as *Usnea subfloridana*, on boughs of old willow trees in the willow carr (both 29th); the 'Pixie Cup' lichen (*Cladonia pyxidata*, 7th); the **Map Lichen (*Rhizocarpon geographicum*)** on dry stone walls along the 'Great North Road' track from Craigencaft Farm to the B923 (21st and 25th), itself parasitised by *Muellerella pygmaea* thus giving two new Loch records for the price of one; *Parmelia subrudecta* on rowan twigs (4th and 7th); and *Lecanora sulphurea* on a wall (7th).

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



Far left: Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) on Kinghorn cliffs, 23rd. **Centre pictures:** Alexanders (*Smyrniolum olusatrum*) on coastal path near Kinghorn (6th, left) and at Ravenscraig (19th, right). **Far right:** Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) at Pettycur, 24th. All photos Robert Mill.

Paul Williams' wife saw a **Barn Owl** beside the B923 near Lochside Grange while driving along the Kinghorn-Kirkcaldy road on 22 March, while my own wife saw one there while dog walking on the evening of 29th.

Small numbers of **Long-tailed Ducks** remained offshore off the coastal path, with Paul Williams noting one on 13th and 8 on 15th. Paul also saw flocks of between 65 and 100 **Common Scoter** on 13th, 15th, 21st and 23rd off Seafield, with three **Velvet Scoter** with them on 21st and one on 23rd. One **Wigeon** was in Seafield harbour on 15th (Paul Williams). **Goosander** were also seen by Paul off Seafield on 21st (two) and 31st (three), while my wife and I saw three off Kinghorn Harbour on 23rd. About 15 **Fulmar** were on the cliffs at Kinghorn beach on 23rd and there were also a few seen at Pettycur on the cliffs there. Most of them were paired up and 'bllling and cooing' (as were a

couple of **Rock Doves/Feral Pigeons** at the top of the cliffs on 23rd) but one or two appeared to be single, or else their partner was away fishing. On 30th a couple of **Gannets** were off the coastal path and my wife and I also, sadly, saw a dead one floating upside down close inshore between Kinghorn and Seafield that day. Paul also saw 18 **Purple Sandpiper** at Seafield on 21st and a **Grey Wagtail** on 13th while my wife and I saw around 20 **Sanderling** at the waterline on the beach at Seafield on 8th as well as two or three **Purple Sandpipers** on the rocks. The commoner waders such as **Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover** and **Turnstone** were also present along the coastal path and some were also seen at Pettycur.

Both **Common** and **Grey Seals**, as well as **Rabbit**, were seen on the Seafield stretch of the coastal path during March by Paul Williams.

Alexanders (*Smyrniium olusatrum*) came into bloom along the coastal path in early March where I found it on 6th. I featured it in my very first Kinghorn biodiversity report, for March last year. This year I not only found lots of it again along the coastal path but also, on 19th, confirmed that there are many plants in Ravenscraig Park (Dysart/Kirkcaldy), especially in the vicinity of the castle's eastern coastal fortifications (see photos, previous page). Kinghorn and Ravenscraig were the two localities where this plant was first discovered in Scotland around two centuries ago and it is good to know that it is still thriving in both locations. The Alexanders rust, ***Puccinia smyrnii***, was once again found on its leaves.



Far left: Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*), Kinghorn harbour, 23rd. **Centre left:** Common Storksbill (*Erodium cicutarium*) on coastal path near Kinghorn (30th). **Centre right:** Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*) near Seafield, 30th. **Far right:** The lichen *Caloplaca thallincola* on rocks at Kinghorn, 23rd. All photos Robert Mill.

Ivy-leaved Toadflax was found in flower on the wall near Kinghorn Harbour (23rd). **Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*)** and **Evergreen Alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*)** were flowering at the base of the cliffs between Pettycur and Burntisland on 24th while **Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*)** was in flower on the cliffs beside Pettycur Road on the same day. On the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield the **Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*)** that several people photographed earlier in the year had stopped flowering though one or two dead flower stems remained (30th). The leaves of some plants of it were heavily infected with a **leaf spot fungus, *Ramularia purpurascens***. **Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*)** was just coming into flower at the foot of the steps down to the beach south of Seafield Tower (30th), while **Common Scurvy-Grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*)** and **Common Storksbill (*Erodium cicutarium*)** were found in flower nearer to Kinghorn on the same outing.

Lichens on the rocks at Kinghorn included the orange ***Caloplaca thallincola*** (23rd).

Reference

MET OFFICE (1 Apr 2022). New March sunshine records. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/end-of-march-statistics> accessed 5 April 2022.