

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - FEBRUARY 2022



A solitary Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) that visited The Ecology Centre's 'Sanctuary' on 22 February 2022, as well as other parts of the Loch and its surroundings on other dates. It had a distinctive thin white line at the base of the beak. Photo Fraser Nicol, The Ecology Centre.

February 2022 was another mild month. Compared with most of January it was a much more turbulent month, with three named storms in quick succession in the space of one week: Dudley on 16/17 February, Eunice on 18th and Franklin on 20th/21st. Our area missed the worst of the deadliest storm, Eunice, for which two rare red warnings were issued, for one for London and SE England and the other for SW England and Wales. Franklin was probably the most sustained storm in our area although Dudley had slightly higher wind speeds over a shorter period, with gusts up to 46 mph, resulting in quite a few trees being brought down in the general Kirkcaldy area. Dudley and Franklin both brought a lot of rain, while we had some snow from the northern flank of Eunice although it either did not settle at all or only lay for a short while. The stormy weather rather curtailed some of my recording efforts although I did try to make the most of the sunny or at least dry and less windy days before, after and in between the storms, making six visits to the Loch but only one very brief visit to Pettycur Bay on 24th during the tail-end of Franklin and none at all to the coastal path.

Another six new records were made in the Loch area during January: 1 mammal, 1 tree, 2 flowering plants, 1 lichenicolous fungus (i.e. one that lives on lichens) and 1 lichen. Five more records from earlier years were also added during February. At the beginning of the month, Paul Williams gave me records of **Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)** at the Troll Bridge on 15 December 2020 and of **Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*)** at the Loch in August/September 2021. Meanwhile, I unearthed a historic record of a **dung beetle, *Teuchestes fossor*** from refuse at the Loch (Evans, 1903, under its former name of *Aphodius fossor*), as well as two even older records of the aquatic snails ***Trichia sericea*** and ***Vertigo antivertigo***. Both of these were found on the banks of the stream flowing out from the Loch at the sluice in March 1896 (Evans, 1898). These 11 additions brought the Loch's biodiversity total up from 1,264 at 31 January 2021 to **1,275** at 28 February 2022.

AROUND THE LOCH

Birds: As in January, 51 bird species were recorded by myself and others around the Loch in February. Apparent 'absentees', compared with both January and December, were the **Water Rail** and both **Great** and **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. A small skein of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over the west end of the Loch while I was in the hide on 14th, and a single individual with a thin white line at the base of the beak was seen in various spots around the Loch on several days between 17th and 25th at least. One drake **Goldeneye** remained throughout, with others of both sexes present on some days, the maximum being six on both 2nd and 14th. There were either 25 (Paul Williams) or 26 (Andy Pay) **Tufted Ducks** on the Loch on 2nd, with 15 seen by Paul on 17th. Two **Pochards** were seen by Paul Williams from the hide area on 17th and I saw two drakes in the southeast corner near the bulrushes by the sluice on 25th. Because of their constant diving, **Coot** were difficult to count but at least 36 were at the west end of the Loch on both 19th and 25th. Some **Dabchicks (Little Grebes)** remained throughout, although numbers seemed lower than in January. **Cormorants** also seemed to be fewer in number although were present throughout the month. Paul Williams saw no fewer than 42 **Curlews** on 2nd and I recorded the species on 6th and 27th. As in January, **Oystercatchers** were recorded on three dates. **Birds of prey** included two records of **Common Buzzard** (2nd, Jacqueline Davidson, Kinghorn Loch Wildlife Group [KLWG] Facebook page; 10th, Paul Williams) and one of **Sparrowhawk** (10th, Paul Williams). Two **Ravens** flew down from the Binn along the line of the hills above the Rodanbraes track and were seen by Fraser Nicol of TEC on 25th. At least one **Jay** was seen near the hide on several dates between 12th and 26th, including my first sighting of it on 14th, while Paul Williams saw two there on 17th. **Mistle Thrush** (3 on 2nd, Paul Williams) and **Redwing** (2nd and 10th, both Paul Williams) were both recorded but there were no sightings of **Fieldfare**. There were three records of **Yellowhammer**, with 15 counted by myself in a tree near the entrance to the access road to The Ecology Centre on 19th. Pauline Bell (KLWG) saw a **Siskin** at the Loch on 12th. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during February 2022 is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Common Buzzard, Common Goldeneye, Common Gull, Common Magpie, Common Pheasant (Ring-necked), Common Pochard, Common Starling, Coot, Curlew, Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great Cormorant, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw (Eurasian), Jay (Eurasian), Little Grebe or Dabchick, Long-tailed Tit, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Oystercatcher, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Raven, Redwing, Robin, Siskin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Tree Sparrow, Treecreeper (Eurasian), Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

Mammals and amphibians: Small groups of **Roe Deer** were by the Rodanbraes track on both 10th (three, Paul Williams) and 11th (four, Tim Nicholson, KSWG; photo on the KSWG Facebook page); these were the first two definite records from the vicinity of the Loch although I had been told that they did occur from time to time. Two **Grey Squirrels** were by the bird feeders on 14th while one was also seen there on 11th (Derek Chappell, KSWG). **Mole hills** were again evident all month in various places around the Loch. No amphibians were seen and a search of the dipping pond failed to reveal any frogspawn.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): As in January, invertebrate records were few and far between, with



Earthworms, Kinghorn Loch, February 2022. Far and centre left: as yet unidentified species with green luminous spots on several segments (centre left photo, arrowed and inset). **Centre and far right:** two mating earthworms, probably belonging to a different species. Saddles (*clitella*; paler swollen areas, arrowed in far-right photo) aligned close together to allow sperm exchange. All photos Robert Mill on 25 February 2022.

no **butterflies, moths, bees, hoverflies, bugs** or **spiders** being seen. An unidentified **ground beetle** was found under one of the mats by myself on 25th. Unlike the last time I found one there, I did manage to take one photo before it scuttled off but unfortunately this was too blurred for identification purposes. However, I did find a single **White-legged Snake Millipede**, a **Black Slug** and at least one, possibly two, as yet unidentified earthworm species. One of these had several pairs of seemingly luminous bright green dots on some segments near the front (rather like the mildly radioactive green dots of alarm clocks and watches of the 1960s), which I thought might have made identification relatively easy. I also saw a pair of earthworms, probably of a different species, mating under one of the mats; they do this by coming together side-by-side so that their reproductive parts, the 'saddle' or *clitellum*, touch each other. Sperm is then exchanged from one worm to the other.

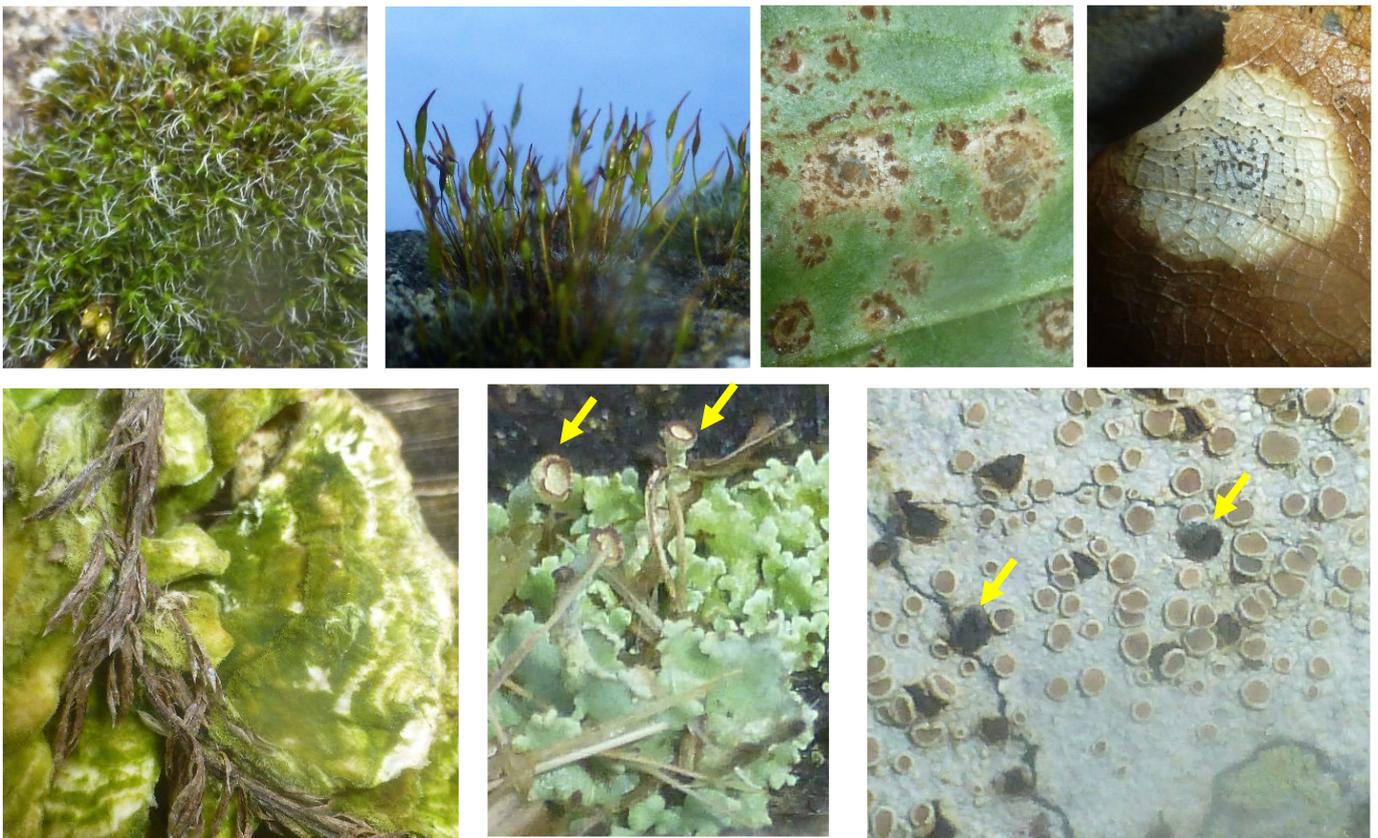
Flowering plants and ferns



Plants in flower around Kinghorn Loch, February 2022. Far and near left: Early Crocus (*Crocus tommasinianus*), 25 February (closed, far left) and 1 March (open, near left). New Loch record. **Near right:** Nordmann fir (*Abies nordmanniana*), 25th. New Loch record. **Right:** Spring Crocus (*Crocus vernus*), 27th. All photos Robert Mill.

Three new Loch records of flowering plants or trees were made during February. I finally identified a small fir tree I had been seeing beside the path just beyond the jetty, near the water mill, as a **Nordmann Spruce (*Abies nordmanniana*)**, one of the Loch's new records. Two presumably deliberately or accidentally introduced **spring bulbs** were also found, both of them also new Loch records: **Early Crocus (*Crocus tommasinianus*)** in the south-east corner above the path leading out from the sluice to the B923, and a dwarf daffodil ***Narcissus (Cyclamineus group)*** with flowers looking like a small 'typical' daffodil and which may have been the very commonly grown cultivar known as 'Tête à Tête'. A photo of this will be in next month's report. **Snowdrops** were in flower throughout the month and typical **Daffodils (*Narcissus pseudo-narcissus* or one of its cultivars)** began to flower from at least 14th (in bud on 6th). The year's first **Hawthorn** leaves were seen unfurling on 19th. Other plants recorded flowering in February were **Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*)**, **Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)**, **Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)**, **Charlock (*Sinapis arvensis*)**, **Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)**, **Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*)**, **Red Campion (*Silene dioica*)**, **White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*)**, **Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*)**, **Borage (*Borago officinalis*)**, **Corn Marigold (*Glebionis segetum*)**, **Spring Crocus (*Crocus vernus*)** and even an obviously recently germinated, very low plant of **Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*)**. A large, fertile plant of **Common Polypody** was found at the western end of the access road from Red Path Brae to Craigenalt Farm, as well as numerous much smaller ones that might be its offspring.

Fungi, lichens, algae and bryophytes



February mosses, fungi, algae and lichens. TOP ROW. Far left: Grey-cushioned Grimmia (*Grimmia pulvinata*), 25th. **Near left:** Wall Screw-moss (*Tortula muralis*), 25th. **Near right:** The rust *Puccinia arenariae* on Red Campion (*Silene dioica*) leaves, 25th. **Far right:** An as yet unidentified mystery: a fungus(?) on recently shed, decaying leaves of Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). **BOTTOM ROW. Left:** Green colouration caused by an alga, probably a *Trebouxia* species, on brackets of Turkeytail fungus (*Trametes versicolor*). New Loch record. **Centre:** The lichen *Cladonia chlorophaea* with fertile structures (arrowed), 19th. New Loch record. **Right:** Parasitic fungus *Unguiculariopsis thallophila* (black, 2 arrowed in yellow) on thallus of the lichen *Lecanora chlorotera*, 19th. *Unguiculariopsis thallophila* is a new Loch record.

Two **mosses** were found on 25th February that confirmed 2018 BioBlitz records: **Wall Screw-moss** (*Tortula muralis*) on the top of the jetty wall, and **Grey-cushioned Grimmia** (*Grimmia pulvinata*) on 25th. **Turkeytail** (*Trametes versicolor*) remained on the stumpery; some of the fruiting bodies were heavily tinged green by an epimycotic [i.e., living on a fungus] **alga** that most likely belonged to the genus *Trebouxia* – another new Loch record. The rust fungus *Puccinia arenariae* was well developed on leaves of Red Champion (19th and 25th). Another mysterious unidentified organism, probably a fungus although looking like a lichen, formed white patches with tiny black reproductive structures on decaying, shed leaves of Sweet Chestnut (19th). Five different lichens were recorded, with one of them, *Cladonia chlorophaea*, being a new Loch record. Finally, on one of the other lichens seen (*Lecanora chlorotera*), the parasitic fungus *Unguiculariopsis thallophila* was found, another new Loch record (19th). This is one of at least two fungi parasitic on this lichen species; I may also have found the other one during the month but I need to take better photos if possible, as it is very much smaller.

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH

This is a very short section of my report this month. On the coastal path between Seafield and Kinghorn, Paul Williams recorded 36 species during at least two outings in February. The highlights were two **Bar-tailed Godwit** (15th), 14 **Common Scoter** (3rd), 4 **Goldeneye** (15th), as well as unspecified numbers of **Long-tailed Duck** and **Purple Sandpiper**.

Ronnie Mackie photographed **Long-tailed Ducks** off Kinghorn beach on 11th, while on the same day Tim Nicholson photographed two of the **Fulmars** on the cliffs; members of the KSWG Facebook group can see their photos on its page. Fifty or more **Common Eider** were off Pettycur Bay on 24th but not much else was braving the strong wind just after the worst of Storm Franklin.

Tim Nicholson noted around 15 **Yellowhammers** visiting his garden in the north end of Lochside Grange on several days. I saw a **Collared Dove** in a bush opposite Oak Street on 25th, probably the furthest out of the village that I have seen that species since moving here 11 months ago.

Pauline Bell (KSWG) photographed a **Kestrel** outside Kinghorn on 2nd while we heard **Tawny Owl** hooting close to our house on several nights and a **Curlew** was heard calling while flying over in the middle of the evening of 25th.

References

EVANS, W. (1898). Records of Scottish land and freshwater molluscs. *Annals of Scottish Natural History* 1898 (no. 27): 185-186. (Page 185.)

EVANS, W. (1903). Some more records of Coleoptera taken in Scotland, chiefly in the Edinburgh (or "Forth") district. *Annals of Scottish Natural History* 1903 (no. 46): 89-99. [Page 95.]

MET OFFICE (1 Mar 2022). A mild winter blows out at the end! <https://blog.metoffice.gov.uk/2022/03/01/a-mild-winter-blows-out-at-the-end/> accessed 3 March 2022.