

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - APRIL 2022



Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*) in flower at the Loch, 29 April 2022. Photo Robert Mill.

As in March, high pressure dominated the weather during most of April. The Met Office (Met Office, 2022) reported that our area of Scotland had only between half and three-quarters the usual amount of rain although we had more than the very dry Aprils of 2020 and especially last year. England and the western half of Scotland were slightly milder than usual but for much of month the winds were coming from colder, easterly or northerly directions and this kept the temperature on the east coast down to average levels, with some days decidedly chilly and even a couple of days with air frost. Our area had an average amount of sunshine, whereas the northeast of Scotland had somewhat below-average sunshine and most of England had above-average amounts. The weather in other parts of Europe as well as in our area affected the migration patterns of some of our common summer bird visitors.

Another nine species were added to the Loch list by myself during April: 3 flies and 6 flowering plants. The figure is significantly lower than my 20-plus additions in March, but I was on holiday elsewhere for some of the month. I was also supplied with three older records from a bat walk attended some time ago by members of the Pitcairn Society: **Common (Bandit) Pipistrelle**, **Soprano Pipistrelle** and **Daubenton's Bat**. These twelve records brought the cumulative total for the Loch area up from 1,301 on 31 March to **1,313** on 30 April. 'New Loch record' is abbreviated NLR.

AROUND THE LOCH



Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*) on dam wall at sluice, Kinghorn Loch, 23 April 2022. Photo Robert Mill.

Birds: Fifty-two bird species were recorded at the Loch or in its immediate vicinity during April. The most notable **summer migrant** at the Loch in April was **Common Sandpiper**, of which there were not just one but *two* records, first on 15th at the boat launch area by Andy Pay (with a photo on the renamed Kinghorn and District Wildlife Group [KDWG] Facebook page) and then on 27th by Paul Williams; whether this was the same bird on a near-two-week visit, or two different birds on passage, is not known. The species has only been recorded once or twice previously at the Loch. The

arrival of our other summer migrants was patchy. **Warblers** like **Chiffchaff** (first arrivals on 11 March, with more in April), **Willow Warbler**, **Blackcap** and even **Common Whitethroat** arrived mostly around their usual times or, in the case of Chiffchaff, possibly a little earlier – I heard my first **Willow Warbler** on 13th April while on holiday on the Isle of Islay, and my first at Kinghorn Loch on 18th, just after I returned. **Blackcaps** were seen or heard singing from 13th (Andy Pay); **Common Whitethroat** always arrives later and my first at the Loch was on my last visit of the month, 29th, although as noted elsewhere in this report there was a record from Seafield on 27th. However, our three **hirundines** – **Barn Swallow**, **Sand Martin** and **House Martin** – were all much later than usual. There was a report on the Kinghorn and District Wildlife Group Facebook page of six Swallows flying over the Loch on the 13th, but the main sightings were not until the end of the month, from 24th onwards. Sand Martins, which can arrive as early as March and whose first arrival at the Loch last year was 11 April, were not seen until 26 April and House Martins had not arrived at all by the end of the month (nor did any arrive in April last year, which was a very cold spring). According to an article in *The Observer* (Moss, 2022), this was partly due to the fact that all the hirundines feed en route during migration, unlike the warblers which fatten themselves up before beginning their long flight. This makes swallows and martins very vulnerable to adverse weather, and the early part of the month was very unsettled in southern Europe with heavy rain and even snow. Even when they did manage to penetrate further north nearer Britain they were then forced to battle against our easterly and northerly winds, holding their arrival back still further. It was only when the wind direction changed to the south at the end of the month that good numbers began to arrive in the UK and that explains why they were so late in arriving in our local area. By contrast, **Pink-footed Geese**, **Black-headed Gulls**, **Common Gulls**, **Curlews** and **Oystercatcher**, all of which were present around the Loch in March, were absent in April and would have moved away to breed, and a single drake **Goldeneye** on 1st was the only record for the month. However, some **Tufted Ducks** remained, with 6 on 13th (Andy Pay) being the highest count. Andy's sighting of a single **Dabchick (Little Grebe)** on 13th was the month's only record of that species, but either one or two **Great Crested Grebes** were present throughout the month, courtship display being noted on several occasions. The **feral goose flock** reared its first broods of goslings of the year, as did the **Mallards**. Two **Coot** and one **Moorhen** nests were also present by the loch shore by the end of the month. **Birds of prey** included two records of **Common Buzzard** (26th by myself, and 27th by Paul Williams) and one of **Common Kestrel** (27th, Paul Williams) but, as in March, none of **Sparrowhawk**. Either one or two **Jays** were again seen near the hide on several dates. **Skylark** was heard singing twice (1st and 23rd), **Treecreeper** seen twice (4th, Tim Nicholson; 25th, Paul Williams), **Reed Bunting** once (27th, Paul Williams) and **Yellowhammer** twice (24th and 25th). The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during April 2022 is: *Barn Swallow, Blackbird, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Common Buzzard, Common Goldeneye, Common Kestrel, Common Magpie, Common Pheasant (Ring-necked), Common Sandpiper, Common Starling, Common Whitethroat, Coot, Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Goldfinch, Great Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, 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, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pied Wagtail, Reed Bunting, Robin, Sand Martin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Tawny Owl, Tree Sparrow, Treecreeper (Eurasian), Tufted Duck, Willow Warbler, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

Mammals and amphibians: There was another record of **Roe Deer** near the Rodanbraes track (27th, Paul Williams). Paul also saw 11 **Brown Hare** on 25th and a **Rabbit** on 27th. **Grey Squirrels** were seen twice near the hide. **Frog spawn** was found during renovation of the pool at the marsh during the month by TEC staff.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'):



Flies, Kinghorn Loch area, April 2022. A, *Gymnocheta viridis*, 21st, NLR. B, *Neomyia viridescens*, 29th, NLR. Inset shows metallic green patch between eyes, arrowed. C, cluster fly *Pollenia cf. rudis*, 29th, NLR. D, Greater Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*), 23rd. Photos Robert Mill.

Once again, relatively few invertebrates were recorded although apart from butterflies and moths I tend to record most of them and I was on holiday part of the month. Four species of **butterflies** were noted: **Small Tortoiseshell** on 19th (Tim Nicholson) and 21st, **Peacock** (two on 25th, Paul Williams), **Orange Tip** (21st by myself, at least 12 seen on 25th by Stephen Sorbie) and **Speckled Wood** on 25th by both Stephen Sorbie and Paul Williams. No **moths** were recorded. The first **Common Carder Bees** of 2022 were noted on 18th, the first **Garden Bumblebee** on 21st and the first **Common Wasp** on 24th; **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** were out and about all month and a **Chocolate Mining Bee** was basking on the jetty wall on 29th. The only **hoverfly** record was of ***Melanostoma scalare*** on dandelion on 24th. ***Gymnocheta viridis*** (21st), ***Neomyia viridescens*** (29th) and a **cluster fly, *Pollenia cf. rudis*** (29th) were all new **fly** records for the Loch. The first two are Greenbottle look-alikes, *Gymnocheta* differing from true Greenbottles (*Lucilia* spp.) in being much more hairy and having a distinctly waisted appearance, and the *Neomyia* species in having a metallic green patch on the front of the head between the eyes (photo B, inset, arrowed). **Greater Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*)** was seen on 23rd feeding on *Pentaglottis sempervirens* (Evergreen Alkanet) at the foot of the track to the Troll Bridge, and on 29th hovering over some blue *Anemone blanda* at the roundabout outside the TEC offices but not visiting the flowers. **Common Bluebottle (*Calliphora vicina*)** was also recorded on three dates. No **bugs** were seen and a **Seven-spot Ladybird** on 21st was the only **beetle** record. Finally, an unidentified small **spider** species was seen in a gorse flower on the 'Great North Road' track up from Craigencalt Farm on 23rd.

Flowering plants and ferns

Three **ferns** (***Wall Rue***, ***Hart's-tongue*** and ***Common Polypody***) and **Water Horsetail** were found in April. Seventy-nine species of **flowering plant** were in bloom. Six were new Loch records, all of them deliberate introductions, four of them bulbous or tuberous plants for spring colour: **Balkan Anemone (*Anemone blanda*)**, **Poppy Anemone (*Anemone coronaria*)**, and a ***Narcissus* (Jonquilla Group)** cultivar resembling 'Hawera' (all from 18th), and another *Narcissus* cultivar resembling ***Narcissus × incomparabilis* (Nonesuch Daffodil)** on 1st. The other two were shrubs: **Japanese Cherry (*Prunus serrulata*)** on 18th and **Thunberg's Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)** on 24th. Both



Loch plants, April 2022. A, Japanese Cherry (*Prunus serrulata*), 18th, NLR. B, *Narcissus* cf. 'Hawera', 18th, NLR. C, Thunberg Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), 24th, NLR. D, Balkan Anemone (*Anemone blanda*), 18th, NLR. E, presumed Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*, 1st. F, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), 29th. G, Cowslip (*Primula veris*), 18th. H, Field Speedwell (*Veronica persica*), 18th. J, Shining Cranesbill (*Geranium lucidum*), 23rd. All photos Robert Mill.

these latter were also seen last year but not identified as we'd just moved to Kinghorn and my identification books hadn't been unpacked from their boxes! A **forget-me-not** with very pale flowers, some bluish, others whiter, seen on 1st more resembled **Changing Forget-me-not** (*Myosotis discolor*) than **Field Forget-me-not** (*M. arvensis*). Other plants noted flowering for the first time in 2022 were **Few-flowered Garlic** (*Allium paradoxum*), **Wavy Bittercress** (*Cardamine flexuosa*), **Bird Cherry** (*Prunus padus*), **Sticky Mouse-ear** (*Cerastium glomeratum*), **Thale Cress** (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) and **Marsh Marigold** (*Caltha palustris*) from 18th, **Lady's Smock** (*Cardamine pratensis*) and **Ash** (*Fraxinus excelsior*) from 21st, **Water Avens** (*Geum rivale*), **Charlock** (*Sinapis arvensis*), **Downy and Silver Birches** (*Betula pubescens*, *B. pendula*), **Shining Cranesbill** (*Geranium lucidum*), **Wood Forget-me-not** (*Myosotis sylvatica*) and **Gooseberry** (*Ribes uva-crispa*) from 23rd, **Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) and **Ribwort Plantain** (*Plantago lanceolata*) from 24th, and **Broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*), **Common Bird's-foot Trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*), **Sun Spurge** (*Euphorbia helioscopia*) and **Common Dog-violet** (*Viola riviniana*) from 29th.

Cryptogams

Few records of cryptogams were made during April, none of them being new Loch records although an unidentified leaf spot on *Anemone blanda* could therefore be new. The downy mildew *Golovinomyces myosotidis* was infecting leaves of the presumed Changing Forget-me-not (1st).

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



Pettycur plants, 30 April 2022. Left: Snow-in-Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*). **Centre:** Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*). **Right:** Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), 30th. Photos Robert Mill.

Paul Williams sent me his usual bird list for Seafield and the coastal path, with 45 species seen by him there during April. The most notable was a **Lesser Whitethroat** skulking in bushes (as they tend to do) on 30th; he also recorded **Common Whitethroat** on both 27th and 30th. **Long-tailed Ducks** remained until the very end of the month off Seafield, with Paul Williams noting six there on 27th and two on 30th. One **Velvet Scoter** was also noted on 27th. **Razorbill** and **Guillemot** were both seen by him on 24th and 27th (and by Pauline Bell on 27th), with the latter also seen on 30th. More than 10 **Kittiwakes** were there on 30th. **Sandwich Terns** arrived during April; my first local sighting was at Seafield on 19th although I had seen them on the Isle of Islay on 9th. They had become numerous off Kinghorn by the end of the month. I saw six **Purple Sandpipers** at Seafield on 19th; two still lingered until at least 28th (Andy Pay, Kinghorn and District Wildlife Group [KDWG] Facebook Page). when Paul Williams saw them.

A 'redhead' (female or juvenile) **Goosander** was at Pettycur on 25th (Tim Nicholson, KDWG). A few **Fulmar** pairs (around five) were nesting on the cliffs at Pettycur (30th) but the ones at Kinghorn were not visited by me during April. Pauline Bell (KDWG) photographed a male **Wheatear** at Seafield on 27th as well as a **Ringed Plover** and a **Kestrel**.

A **Barn Owl** was hunting over Kinghorn Beach in late April, probably around 27th (Lynne Brown, photo posted on the KDWG Facebook Page on 28 April).

Pauline Bell photographed a **Peacock butterfly** at Seafield on 27th (KDWG). My visit to Pettycur on 30th yielded a few interesting **plant** records. The cliffside was covered with large masses of orange and yellow **Wallflower** (*Erysimum cheiri*) and blue **Evergreen Alkanet** (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*). **Wild Clary** (*Salvia verbenaca*) was already in flower at the Kinghorn side of the cliffs; the plant found was, I think, not the same one that I found and photographed for my June 2021 report. **Common Rock-rose** (*Helianthemum nummularium*), well-naturalised **Snow-in-Summer** (*Cerastium tomentosum*), **Thrift** (*Armeria maritima*) and **Tuberous Comfrey** (*Symphytum tuberosum*) were all in flower there, as well as several clumps of **Cornsalad** (*Valerianella locusta*). However, the tiny plant of the latter species that I found last year on the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield has not yet been re-found this year despite searching for it.

References

MET OFFICE (3 May 2022). April showers dwindled in dry month. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/2022/05/03/april-2022-dry-weather/> accessed 5 April 2022.

Moss, S. (2022). For centuries, swallows told us spring is here. But now nature is awry. *The Observer* (1 May 2022), page 46.