

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – NOVEMBER 2023 by Robert Mill



Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), in full bloom on 21 November 2023 when most plants of the species had set seed and died off. The plant was still flowering after early December's frosts and snow! Photo Robert Mill.

In November 2023, eastern Scotland, including our area of Fife, had both temperatures and rainfall that were close to the long-term average (Met Office, 2023a). However, it turned decidedly colder towards the end of the month as 'Meteorological Winter' (1 December-28 February) approached. There were another two named storms during the month, Storm Ciarán from 1st-3rd (Met Office, 2023b) whose effects, especially its very strong winds, mainly impacted the Channel coast and France, although the whole UK east coast received more rain than usual; and Storm Debi from 12th-14th which tracked across Scotland (Met Office, 2023c). Kinghorn's November rainfall total, as measured by the SEPA rain gauge at The Ecology Centre, was 57.4 mm, just over four-fifths of the longer-term average of 69.3 mm for the site (SEPA, 2023). About half of this, 27.8 mm, fell between 12th and 14th (Storm Debi) and almost a quarter (13.6 mm) during Storm Ciarán. Eight out of the 30 days were completely dry and on 13 others less than 0.5 mm fell. Temperatures in our area, like most of the UK, were average for the time of year (only northern and western Scotland were colder than average). However, there were some mild spells as well as two particularly cold snaps, a short one mid-month and a longer one in the final week and into the beginning of December. In our area, the 1st-8th, 11th, 13th, and 18th-23rd (especially 22nd and 23rd) had temperatures at or above the 1991-2020 average while the 9th and 10th, 12th, 14th-17th and 24th-30th (especially the last two days) were colder than average (Met Office, 2023d). Sunshine was slightly above average and it was slightly less windy than average (Met Office, 2023d).

I made seven recording trips to the Loch in November, three in the first half (2nd, 6th and 10th) and four near the end of the month (21st, 23rd, 25th and 28th). In contrast to recent months, I myself discovered only five new Loch records during November (one tree, two fungi and two lichens), but research in NBN Atlas and elsewhere uncovered four others (two flies, *Paradelia intersecta* and *Phaonia subventa*, and two bryophytes, **Marsh Thyme-moss** and **Endive Pellia**, the latter being a historic record by James McAndrew cited by Macvicar, 1910). These had all either been recently added to NBN or had been overlooked when I last visited the website. The grand total therefore increased by 9, from 1,657 (31 October) to **1,666** on 30 November.

AROUND THE LOCH Birds: Fifty-one bird species were recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch in November, seven less than in October. As usual, I am indebted to Paul Williams (abbreviated PW) for many sightings. Unlike October, November's birds were all typical of winter. **Willow Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and **Swallow**, all of which were all present for at least part of October, had all gone. The month's three main highlights were all on 2nd, when Nigel Voaden (eBird) recorded a **Pochard**, two **Common Crossbills** and, best of all, two **Waxwings**. 2023 is a big 'irruption year' for Waxwings, with large numbers seen all across the UK and it's good that the Loch has not missed out even though it was only two birds and not a big flock! Also on the 2nd, more than 120 **Pink-footed Geese** were seen flying over the Loch by Paul Williams, the only such sighting although

they were regularly seen or heard by myself over nearby Lochside Grange. In addition to the Pochard, **water birds** included **Tufted Ducks** from 21st, with six seen on 27th (PW). **Goldeneye** were present all month, usually two or three, but six were seen on 2nd by Nigel Voaden at 8.15 a.m. and PW noted four on the same date three hours later. **Collared Dove** was seen once in November in the Loch area (9th). **Coot** were present from 21st, initially just one bird but on 27th and 28th this had doubled to two – still far fewer than often seen at this time of year. **Little Grebes** were present all month, with more than 15 seen by PW on 27th, but **Great Crested Grebes** were only seen once, by myself on 28th when, close to the hide, I saw what I assumed to be this year's 'west end parents' with their most recent juvenile. The other parents and their young have presumably dispersed to the coast. **Grey Herons** (6th, 9th) and **Cormorants** (2nd and 24th) were each seen twice by PW. **Curlew** was recorded twice (6th, PW; four seen by me on 25th, flying south over the Loch) and there was a single visit by a **Great Black-backed Gull** (2nd, PW). It was a good month for birds-of-prey sightings, with **Buzzard** seen on four dates by PW, **Sparrowhawk** by PW on 6th and **Kestrel** by PW on 6th and 9th and by myself on 10th when a male was hovering above the ecocemetery land. However, **Kingfisher** was not recorded from the Loch in November. I heard a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** near The Ecology Centre on 6th and PW posted some wonderful photos and video of one feeding outside the hide on 27th. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during November 2023 is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Common Gull, Coot, Cormorant, (Common) Crossbill, Curlew, Dabchick (Little Grebe), Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Fieldfare, Goldcrest, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Pochard, Redwing, Robin, Rook, Sparrowhawk, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Waxwing, Wood Pigeon, Wren.*

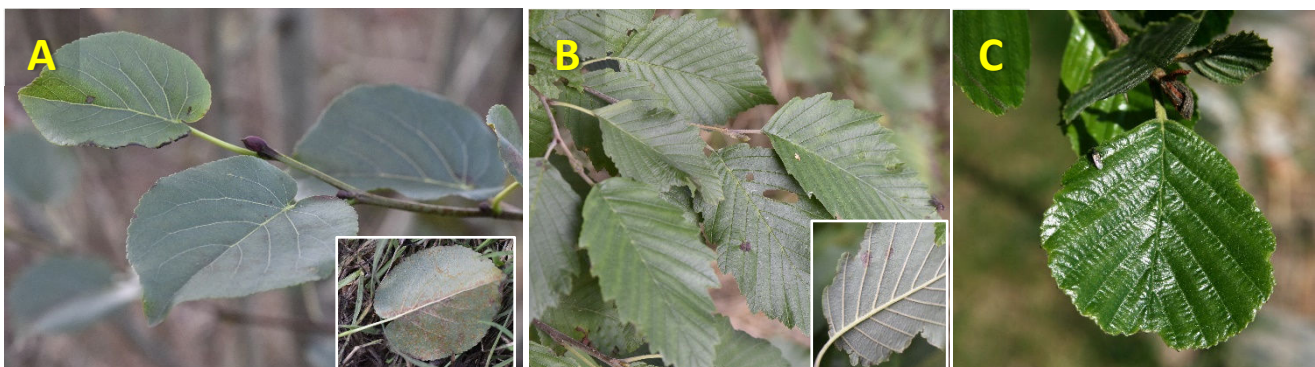


Common Earwig (*Forficula auricularia*), 10th. Photo Robert Mill.

Mammals, amphibians and fish: **Grey Squirrel** (24th and 27th, PW) and plenty of fresh **Mole** hills were the only mammal records. No **amphibians** were noted.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): Only three invertebrate records were made during my November visits, a massive drop compared with October. All were insects. The large 'crop' of **Oak Marble Galls** seen on one particular oak tree in October had been reduced to a single remaining one by 6 November. A **Yellow Dung Fly** was seen on the same date, while on 10th I noticed a **Common Earwig** lying on top of a yellow dandelion-like flowerhead in the Pollinator Beds.

Flowering plants and ferns:



Alder species recorded from Kinghorn Loch in 2023. **A**, Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*), 25th November, NLR. Leaves slightly paler beneath but not grey, with heart-shaped base and many small, fine teeth. **B**, Grey Alder (*Alnus incana*), 31st August (an August NLR). Leaves oval, very grey beneath, with acute apex, wedge-shaped base and few, large, sharp teeth. **C**, Common Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), the only native species. Leaves broader above the middle, not grey beneath, with very rounded apex (the very tip often notched), a rounded base and shallow, blunt teeth. Photos **A** and **B** Robert Mil, **C** by Alinja, CC BY-SA 4.0 licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>), via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alnus_glutinosa_tervalepp%C3%A4_lehti.jpg.



Plants around the Loch, late November 2023. **A**, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), next year's male catkins developing, 25th. **B**, Sprouting snowdrop bulbs (*Galanthus* sp.), 28th. **C**, Long-headed Poppy (*Papaver dubium*) bud opening, 21st. **D**, Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), 23rd. All photos Robert Mill.

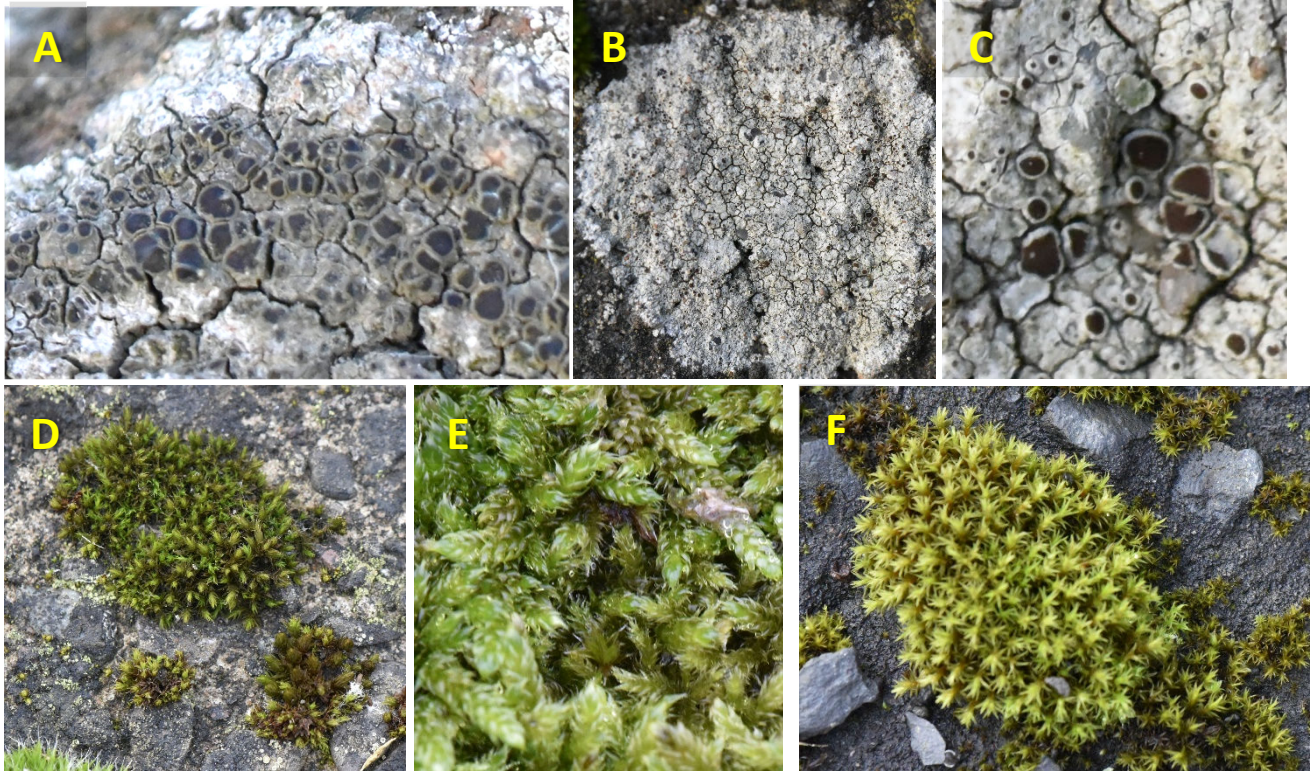
Forty wild or naturalised plants were in flower during November and many of these had ceased flowering or been frost-damaged by the month's end. I found another 11 in fruit, 7 in vegetative states, two in bud and **snowdrop** bulbs beginning to sprout – 61 species in all. As well as these I noted 32 cultivated flowering plant species (26 in flower), as well as four ferns. One of the 61 species in wild situations was a new Loch record: **Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*)**, found on 25th near the path in to the Loch from Birch Avenue. This is the second introduced Alder species found in the Loch recording area this year, after Grey Alder (*Alnus incana*) that was discovered in August, and brings the total known alder species known from around the Loch to three including the native *Alnus glutinosa*. The three species are all easily separated by leaf characters (see photos, previous page). Near where I found the Italian Alder, as well as beside the track along the northwest shoreline, **Hazel** bushes had begun developing next year's catkins. Also along the NW bank, **Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*)** was in fruit (28th). While many plants, both wild and cultivated, had stopped flowering by the end of the month, others such as **Bramble**, **Long-headed Poppy**, **Common Knapweed** and both **Red** and **White Campion** seemed to be going on forever, and **Wild Carrot** seemed to get a new lease of life, with some very healthy-looking plants found in full bloom although most had set seed and turned brown.



New fungi records, Kinghorn Loch, November 2023. **A**, Brown Mottlegill or Lawnmower's Mushroom (*Panaeolina foenicicii*), 6th (inset bottom right: gills from below). **B**, Wood Blewit (*Lepista nuda*), gills and stipe 23rd (inset top left: cap from above). Both NLRs. Photos Robert Mill.

Cryptogams Far fewer species of **fungi** were noted around the Loch during November – only nine, compared to 43 in October, two being NLRs. This was undoubtedly because many of their hosts had shed their leaves, on which the rusts, mildews or leaf spots had been present. **Brown Mottlegill (*Panaeolina foenicicii*)**, a very common little brown mushroom of lawns and also known as Lawnmower's Mushroom, was a new Loch record (6th); its cap fades to white with age and the gills are dark grey with whitish mottling. The month's second fungal NLR was **Wood Blewit (*Lepista nuda*)**, several of which were near trees at the edge of Craigencait car park (23rd). **Snowy Waxcap** fungi (*Cuphophyllus virgineus* agg.) reappeared on the grassy area

with boats facing the east shore of the Loch (6th) and **Conifer Mazegill** brackets (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*) continued developing on logs bordering the pollinator beds and near the polytunnel while **Smoky Bracket** (*Bjerkandera adusta*) brackets were found on 23rd. *Marssonina salicicola* leaf spot was extensive on the big weeping willow near the mill race outflow (28th) and the alder rust *Melampsorium hiratsukanum* was found on leaves of Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*), indirectly leading to the recognition of that tree species as a new Loch record since I had to identify the fungal host before I could identify the fungus itself!



New and noteworthy cryptogam records, Kinghorn Loch, November 2023. A-C, Lichens: A, *Protoparmelia badia*, 23rd, NLR. B & C, *Circinaria caesiocinerea*, 25th, NLR: B, whole thallus; C, enlargement showing apothecia (blackish fruiting bodies). D-F, Mosses: D, Thickpoint Grimmia (*Schistidium crassipilum*), 21st. E, Cypress-leaved Plait-moss (*Hypnum cupressiforme*), 21st. F, Great Hairy Screw-moss (*Syntrichia ruralis*), 28th. D-F All newly recorded near east shore of Loch, previous records from 2011 at west end. Photos Robert Mill.

At least 21 **lichens** were also recorded, two of them for the first time, although, as with my October records, more that I photographed still remain to be identified at the time of writing in early December. The two NLRs were *Protoparmelia badia* on a dry stone dyke by the track to the Kissing Trees road (23rd) and *Circinaria caesiocinerea* on a wall near the steps from the pollinator beds up to the Throne (25th). Several other species were found at new locations.

Among the month's five identified **moss** records, the discoveries of *Schistidium crassipilum* (**Thickpoint Grimmia**) and *Hypnum cupressiforme* (**Cypress-leaved Plait-moss**) on the dam wall (both 21st) as well as of *Syntrichia ruralis* (**Great Hairy Screw-moss**) on the vehicle track to the dam from the B923 on 28th not only confirmed records of these three species from the Loch made in 2011 by David Chamberlain and others but also extended their known distribution at the Loch, since as in all three cases my records were in the eastern monad (OS 1-km square NT 2687) whereas the earlier records were all from the west end of the Loch in NT 2587 (NBN Atlas, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



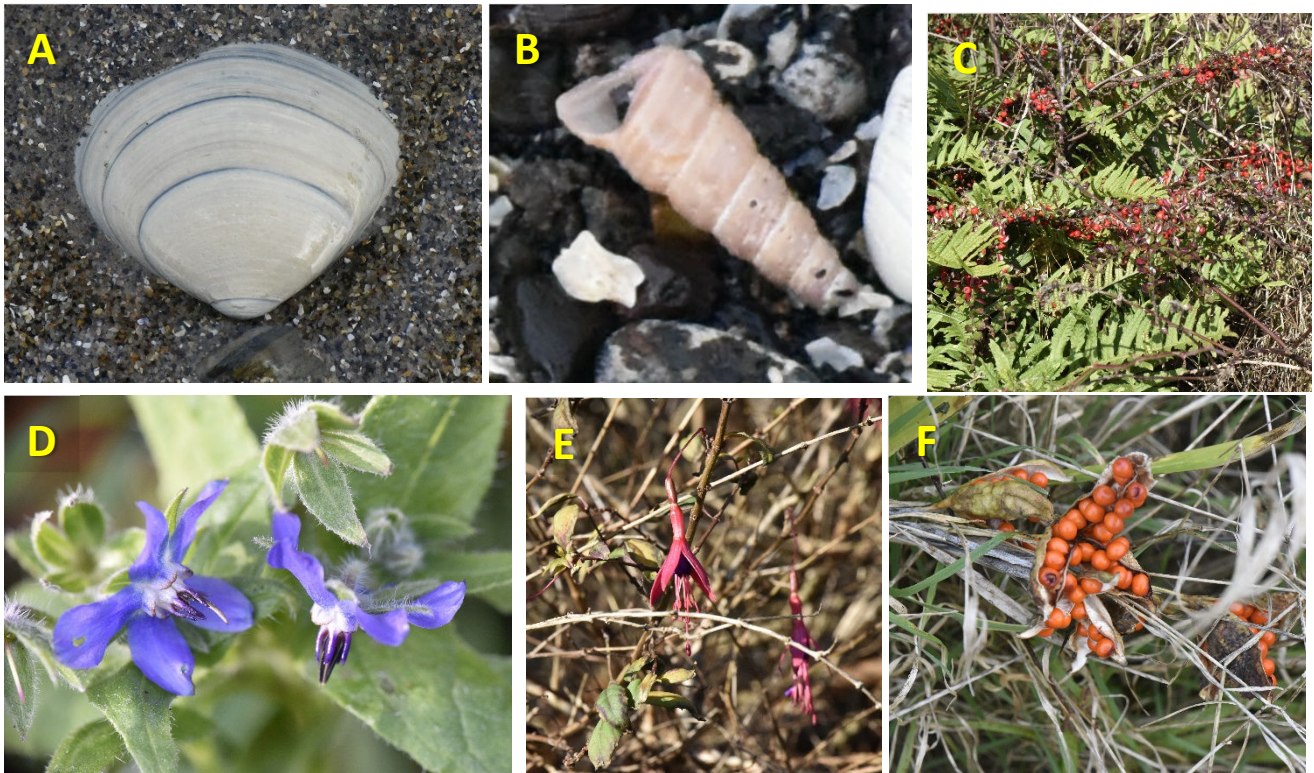
One of many bluish-coloured Pod Razor Shells (*Ensis siliqua*) washed up at Pettycur, 7th. Photo Robert Mill.

November 2023 was a rather unremarkable month for birds in the Kinghorn area. This partly resulted from less attention seemingly being given to Kinghorn by birdwatchers compared with September and October. Graham Sparshott made only one visit to North Mire (on 3rd) and none to the coast, and the only list submitted to the eBird website was by Lukasz Pulawski on 21st (eBird, 2023). Apart from those, a few posts on the Kinghorn District Wildlife Group [KDWG]’s Facebook page, and my

own sightings, my only source of records was Paul Williams (PW) who sent me numerous lists from the Seafield—Kinghorn coastal path as well as his ones from the Loch. Skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over the Lochside Grange area on several occasions, including over 120 going west above Birch Avenue at dusk on 25th, while Graham Sparshott noted 45 going NE over North Mire on 3rd and Lukasz Pulawski saw 27 over the village/harbour area on 21st. **Long-tailed Ducks** were present all along the coast throughout the month in good numbers, with ‘hundreds’ off Kinghorn on 29th (Ronnie Mackie, KDWG). **Common Scoters** were also off Seafield (16th and 27th, PW with over 50 on the latter date) as well as off Kinghorn (26th with a few **Velvet Scoters** among them, Ronnie Mackie) and the Kinghorn end of the coastal path (28th, PW). There were two **Shelduck** at Kinghorn on 21st (Lukasz Pulawski). The only records of any **diver** species were of **Red-throated Divers** off Kinghorn (26th, Ronnie Mackie) and off the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield (5 in total on 28th, Paul Williams). **Shags** were offshore all month although PW posted on the KDWG Facebook page that large numbers had sadly been killed during Storm Babet and many of their bodies have been washed up amongst the storm debris at Seafield. November **wader** records included two by PW of **Sanderling** at Seafield (two on 24th, eight on 28th), as well as two of **Ringed Plover** there (8th and 25th, PW), as well as **Curlew**, **Turnstone**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Redshank**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Oystercatcher**, all of which were commonly seen. **Razorbills** and **Common Guillemots** were regularly spotted offshore and unfortunately a dead Guillemot was found by me washed up on Pettycur beach (7th). PW saw a single **Kingfisher** on the beach at Seafield on both 6th and 25th. Graham Sparshott saw 60 **Redwings**, 20 **Blackbirds** and 20 **Fieldfares** at North Mire on 3rd (with another 50 Fieldfares migrating SW), while I also saw several Fieldfares at North Mire (8th). A **Goldcrest** photographed by Gavin Wilkinson along the coastal path on 19th (KDWG) was a somewhat unusual record for that area. Apart from the two seen at the Loch on 2nd, no **Waxwings** seem to have been reported locally although they have been seen at Beveridge Park in Kirkcaldy. Over 10 **Yellowhammers** were seen on 25th at our end of the coastal path by PW, who also saw a **Reed Bunting** at the Seafield end the same day.

Sam Tedcastle (KDWG) posted a lovely photo of a **Hedgehog** walking up Park Place on 25th. A row of many **mole** hills along the low but quite steep east bank of Mire Park (27th) seemed rather unusual to me as I am more used to seeing them on more-or-less level ground. Off the coast, four **Bottlenose Dolphins** were spotted by Ronnie Mackie on 16th while **Harbour Porpoises** were recorded by him and others on several dates from then until the end of the month (10 on 16th, Lynn Campbell; 8 on 17th and 10 on 21st, Jane Ferguson; singles on both 28th and 29th, Ronnie Mackie; all records from Seawatch Foundation, 2023). Meanwhile, a **Sei Whale** was seen off Joppa and Portobello on the other side of the Forth opposite Kinghorn on 12th (Seawatch Foundation, 2023) but there is no evidence that it came across to the Kinghorn side, unlike the one that was seen off Kinghorn on 1 and 25 July 2021.

I noted no **land invertebrates** on any of my walks in November other than at the Loch. On the beaches I noticed a lot of **Pod Razor** shells washed up at Pettycur on 7th (my first visit there since recent storms) and most of these were bluish on the outside instead of the usual brown colour. A slightly unusual shell found by me at Kinghorn beach on 20th was a **Rayed Artemis** (*Dosinia exoleta*) which has been recorded from local beaches in 2001 (Rosemary Hill, NBN Atlas 2023d, as ‘Seafield, Kirkcaldy’ but with the grid reference given as ‘NT278868’ which indicates a location offshore off the rocks at the north end of our local Kinghorn beach. A couple of very small **Auger Shells** (*Turritellinella tricarinata*) had been washed up at Pettycur (7th).



Coast and countryside biodiversity, November 2023. **A**, Rayed Artemis (*Dosinia exoleta*), Kinghorn, 20th. **B**, Auger Shell (*Turritellinella tricarinata*), Pettycur, 7th. **C**, Wall Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*) growing with Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*), coastal path, 9th. **D**, Borage (*Borago officinalis*), coastal path, 9th. **E**, Some of the last Fuchsia flowers (*Fuchsia magellanica*) of 2023, coastal path, 9th. **F**, Stinking Iris fruits (*Iris foetidissima*), Mid Mire, 8th. Photos Robert Mill.

Plant records were relatively few compared with the summer and earlier autumn months. At Mid Mire on 8th, I found a second, previously unnoticed plant of **Stinking Iris (*Iris foetidissima*)** in a much more open and conspicuous site than the one found last year (and which I photographed in flower earlier this year). The plant at this new location had produced numerous orange berry-like seeds whereas the one at the original site has not set any seed this year. The NBN Atlas gives only one record of this species potentially from our area, one that dates from the year range 1987–1999 and is only to 10-km square accuracy as ‘NT28’ which, apart from Kinghorn, includes Burntisland, east Aberdour, Puddledub, Seafield and everything in between, as well as Inchkeith Island. There are several records from neighbouring NT18 that have more accurate locations (Inverkeithng, Fordell and several from the Dalgety Bay area), as well as other sites scattered across Fife (NBN Atlas, 2023e). Along the coastal path on 9th, I noticed a curious juxtaposition of **Common Polypody** fern and **Wall Cotoneaster** growing together on a grassy bank, while **Borage (*Borago officinalis*)** and **Fuchsia (*Fuchsia magellanica*)** continued flowering (despite the latter having dropped most of its leaves), and **Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*)** was already forming flower buds whereas there were as yet no signs of any developing on the **Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*)** patches.

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