

## KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – MARCH 2024 by Robert Mill



Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), 12 March 2024. Photo Robert Mill.

March 2024, the first month of meteorological spring, was mostly dull and wet. In Scotland it was also cooler than south of the Border, with England and Wales enjoying some very mild spells whereas Scottish temperatures were overall only slightly above-average (Met Office, 2024a). Although west (especially NW) Scotland was the only UK area to enjoy above-average sunshine, the eastern half including Fife was duller than average like England and Wales. The Kinghorn Loch rain gauge registered 73 mm in the whole of March, 142% of the site's average; as I write this, that amount has already been exceeded in April, as at least another 79 mm had fallen by the morning of the 9th (SEPA, 2024). On top of the March rainfall, this had led to saturated ground and even what look like new, or at least revived, streams! Maximum temperatures in our area were above average on 5th, 12th, 13th, 16th-19th, 21st-24th and 29th-31st March and below average on 1st-4th, 6th-11th, 14th, 15th, 20th and 25th-28th (Met Office, 2024b).

Despite the often poor weather I made three long and three shorter recording trips during March, while Paul Williams visited five times in the first half before going overseas in the second half. Nigel Voaden also visited on 11th while there were also single visits by other people on other dates. Another three new Loch records were added during March; as in February, they comprised one flowering plant and two fungi. In addition to these, I did some more research on the past vegetation of the Loch, particularly the marsh at the west end, and this turned up records of three more plants that once grew there that I was previously unaware of: **Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*)**, collected three times by local botanist J.T.I. Boswell Syme in 1870, 1874 and 1875 but not recorded by West (1910); **Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*)**, found by E.P. Beattie and former Fife plant recorder G.H. Ballantyne in 1957 (Wallace, 1965, p. 132) and **Plicate Sweet-grass (*Glyceria notata*)**, recorded by the current Fife plant recorder, Sandy Edwards, on 15 August 2014 (NBN Atlas, 2024a). These brought the cumulative total up from 1,672 (29 February) to **1,678** on 31 March.

**AROUND THE LOCH Birds:** No fewer than 60 bird species were recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch in March. As usual, I thank Paul Williams (abbreviated PW) for his records, while Nigel Voaden is abbreviated NV. March brought about the first arrivals and departures of spring. Of winter visitors, **Fieldfare** was not recorded at all in March while **Redwing** was only seen once (6th, PW). On the other hand, **Chiffchaffs** returned from 16th (Pauline Bell, Kinghorn District Wildlife Group [KDWG]), possibly a few days earlier than last year; by the end of the month there were two, maybe three, singing males present. About 20 **Pink-footed Geese** descended into one of the fields near Craigencalt Cottages on 19th. Earlier Nigel Voaden spotted a single **Shelduck** on the Loch (11th). A long-staying female **Red-breasted Merganser** was present from 1st-12th at least; on 11th it was joined by a drake and another female, while on 12th the drake was also present together



Female Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), 9th. Photo Paul Williams.

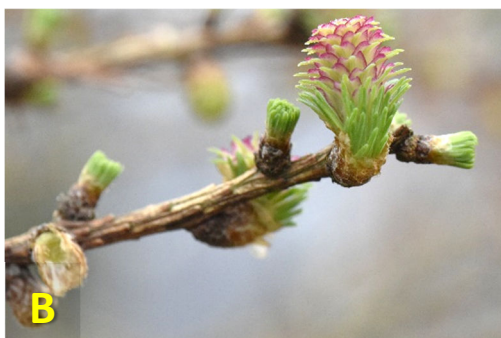
with one of the two females. A female **Pochard** was also on the Loch on both 9th (PW) and 11th (NV, also PW). **Goldeneye** were also seen until 12th but apparently not thereafter; the highest count was 4 on 11th. A few **Tufted Ducks** remained until 12th with no records from then on, although when I visited on 4th April five had returned. Two **Great Crested Grebes** were present throughout March, with a third also on the Loch on 6th; the pair began courtship and nest-building in the first week of March (PW). Up to four **Little Grebes (Dabchicks)** also remained all month. As in February, **Coot** were present all month in low numbers. Thirty **Curlew** were seen on 11th (NV) with lower numbers, or singles, on other dates until 19th at least. **Black-headed Gulls** were seen till 11th but then went off to breeding-grounds. **Common Gulls** were also last seen about the same time while there was a single record of **Great Black-backed Gull** (12th). **Buzzards** (five dates), **Kestrel** (11th, NV) and **Sparrowhawk** (16th, Pauline Bell, KDWG) were all seen around the Loch in March and the **Kingfisher** continued to visit the west end of the Loch until 4th. **Rook** was seen once (4th, PW) but there were no March

sightings of **Jay**. **Treecreepers** were spotted twice (4th, PW; 11th, NV), as were **Goldcrest** (6th, PW; 11th, NV), **Skylarks** (9th, PW; 11th, NV) and **Yellowhammers** (9th, Bing Dong [eBird]; 11th, NV). Nigel Voaden also saw three **Grey Wagtails** on 11th, and a **House Sparrow** amongst the regular **Tree Sparrows**. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during March 2024 is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Common Gull, Coot, Cormorant, Curlew, Dabchick (Little Grebe), Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Goldcrest, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Grey Wagtail, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, House Sparrow, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Kingfisher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Linnet, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Pochard, Red-breasted Merganser, Redwing, Robin, Rook, Shelduck, Skylark, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Starling, Tree Sparrow, Treecreeper, Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

**Mammals, amphibians and fish:** Eleven **Roe Deer** were up near Rodan Braes on 6th (PW) and Elaine O'Rourke (KDWG) saw four, as well as a **Rabbit**, on 18th. **Grey Squirrel** was seen on 9th by Paul Williams and as usual many fresh **Mole** hills were at various spots around the Loch shore. **Common Frog** spawn was found in the marsh pond on 11th by myself and two other folk associated with TEC.

**Invertebrates ('minibeasts'):** Once again very few invertebrates braved the inclement March weather. **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** were flying on 24th while two more **Garden Snails** were found on 19th.

### Flowering plants and ferns:



Flowering plants and ferns, Kinghorn Loch, March 2024. **A**, double daffodil (*Narcissus* cf. 'Telemonius Plenus'), 12th, new Loch record. **B**, European Larch (*Larix decidua*), new leaves and young female cone, 11th. **C**, Hart's-tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), new site record, 7th. Photos Robert Mill.

Forty-four wild or naturalised plant species were in bloom at some time during March, more than twice as many as in February. They included another new Loch record, a naturalised all-yellow double daffodil most resembling **Narcissus 'Telemonius Plenus'**. First-flowering dates at the Loch noted for various species in March 2024 included **European Larch, Blackthorn, Coltsfoot** and **Osier**, as well as wild/naturalised **Lungwort**, all from 11th; corresponding dates in 2023 for these were, respectively, 17 Mar (Larch and Blackthorn), and 5 Mar (Coltsfoot, Osier and Lungwort). **Primrose, Red Campion** and the dwarf yellow-and-orange daffodil





**More March flowers at the Loch.** *A*, Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), 12th. *B*, wild or naturalised Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*), yellow cultivar), 11th. *C*, Osier male catkins (*Salix viminalis*), 11th. Photos Robert Mill.

**Narcissus 'Jetfire'** were first noticed in flower on 12th (2023 dates respectively 20 Feb, 17 April and 5 Mar). **Evergreen Alkanet** and **Common Field-speedwell** were first noted in flower on 18th (2023 dates 4 Apr and 17 Mar), while **Weeping Willow**, **Glory-of-the-Snow** and **Siberian Squill** were first noted on 24th (2023: 8 Mar, 17 Mar and 25 Mar). Unlike February, when most species flowered earlier than last year, there was no definite pattern in March, with some (e.g., Larch, Blackthorn, Red Campion, Evergreen Alkanet) coming into bloom earlier or at the same time as last year, while others (e.g., Coltsfoot, Lungwort, Primrose, Weeping Willow) were first noted a week or more later than in 2023.

Four **fern** species were noted, including **Hart's-tongue Fern** at a previously unnoticed location near the western boundary of the area that I record around Kinghorn Loch.

### **Cryptogams**



**Fungi, Kinghorn Loch, March 2024.** *A*, Yellow Brain (*Tremella mesenterica*), 12th, second Loch record. Its host (not clearly visible) is another wood-decaying fungus that is a new Loch record (see text). *B*, Glistening Inkcaps (*Coprinellus micaceus*), 12th, new Loch record. *C*, Scarlet Elfcup (*Sarcoscypha cf. austriaca*), new site, 12th. Photos Robert Mill.

Seven species of **fungi** were recorded around the Loch during March. Two were new Loch records (NLRs): on 18th, a group of **Glistening Inkcaps** (*Coprinellus micaceus*) was found on rotting wood by the exit to the B923, while on 11th and 12th **Yellow Brain fungus** (*Tremella mesenterica*) was found on dead hardwood near the marsh pond. Yellow Brain itself is not a new Loch record, having been found once before, by Andy Pay in 2021. However, what I did not know then is that Yellow Brain fungus feeds, not on dead or rotting wood itself, but on other fungi species living on the rotting wood, i.e., it is mycoparasitic (Zugmaier et al., 1994). Those fungi all belong to the genus *Peniophora*. Therefore, wherever Yellow Brain fungus is found, one can deduce that *Peniophora* is, or has been, also present. The most likely *Peniophora* species at the Loch is **Rosy Crust** (*Peniophora incarnata*), whose hosts include gorse (on which Andy Pay found Yellow Brain in 2021) and various hardwood trees. Thus, the genus *Peniophora*, though not as yet any particular species, has been added as a new Loch record. **Warlock's Butter** (*Exidia nigricans*) was found again on 12th and 24th, with the latter record being from a second site. A **Scarlet Elfcup** fungus (*Sarcoscypha cf. austriaca*) was also found near the marsh pond (11th & 12th) where I had not previously found it. At least 12 **lichens**, and five **mosses**, were also re-found.

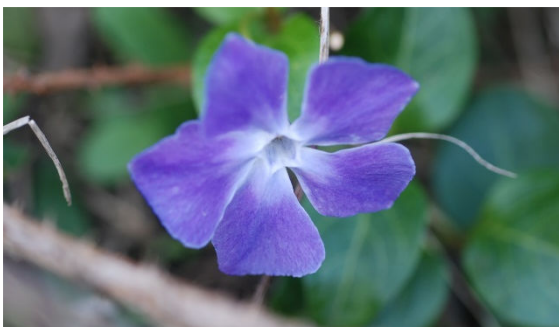
## VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH

As well as records by Paul Williams (PW), Graham Sparshott (GS) and myself, bird sightings in the Kinghorn area were logged on eBird by Bing Dong (BD), Ewan Band (EB), John Hutchison (JH), Jon Penman (JP), Lukasz Pulawski (LP) and Robert Cousins (RC), and by Bruce Meldrum and Tim Nicholson on the KDWG Facebook page.

Tim Nicholson photographed two **Red-legged Partridges** in the vicinity of Kinghorn on 8th. **Long-tailed Ducks** were off the coastline all month with the highest count being 35 on 31st (LP). **Common Scoters** were noted all month, with a movement of 81 NE off Pettycur on 30th (GS) and more than 30 off the Kinghorn end of the coastal path on 5th (PW). Five **Goosanders** were off Kinghorn harbour on 23rd (EB) while **Red-breasted Mergansers** were frequently seen with a high count of 84 off Pettycur (17th, GS). Two **Shelducks** went past Pettycur (17th, GS) and on the following day a single **Great Crested Grebe** was there (RC). Small numbers (1 to 3 individuals) of **Red-throated Divers** were often seen while a single **Great Northern Diver** was at Pettycur on 23rd (GS). **Wader** records included a single **Sanderling** at Pettycur (9th, BD) as well as commoner species such as **Knot**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Turnstone** and **Dunlin** but, unlike February, there were no records of either **Bar-** or **Black-tailed Godwits**. Twenty-five **Gannets** were spotted off the coastal path on 31st (LP), the first record this year. Small numbers of both **Razorbills** and **Common Guillemots** were off the coasts all month; Bruce Meldrum posted a photograph of the brindled form of **Common Guillemot** (i.e., with a white line running from the eye towards the back of the neck) on the KDWG Facebook page (3rd). **Skylarks** began singing during March and could be heard and seen over both the coast path and local fields. The first **Chiffchaff** record I'm aware of was by Paul Williams at Seafield on 11th; this is a few days earlier than the first record at the Loch. Graham Sparshott noted small numbers of **Meadow Pipits** moving NE on three occasions, the biggest number being 50 on 22nd. **Rock Pipits** were at Pettycur (GS, 22nd) and the coast path (two on 31st, LP). GS noted small **finch** movements off Pettycur on several dates, involving **Linnets**, **Siskins** and other species. Lastly, Paul Williams photographed a male **Reed Bunting** by the coastal path, not quite in full breeding plumage (11th).



Male Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), moulting into breeding plumage beside coastal path, 11th.  
Photo Paul Williams.

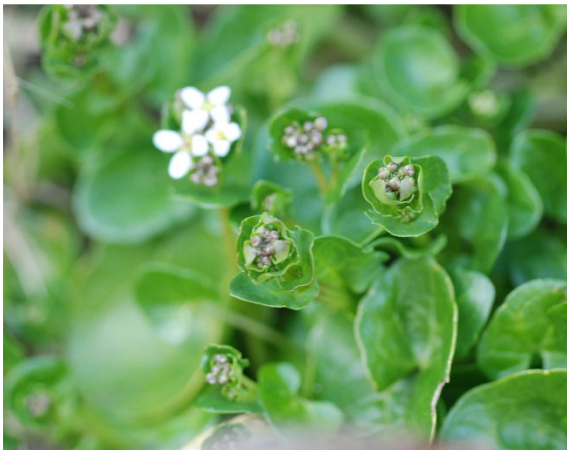


**Top:** One of numerous Common Starfish (*Asterias rubens*) washed up at Pettycur, 5th. **Bottom:** Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major*), Pettycur, 5th.  
Photos Robert Mill.

Bruce Meldrum was fortunate to photograph two different **dolphin** species off Kinghorn during March: **Short-beaked Common Dolphins** (*Delphinus delphis*) on 17th and **Bottle-nose Dolphins** (*Tursiops truncatus*) on 25th. The former dolphin species is a rather uncommon visitor to our coast, being much less frequent here than Bottle-nose Dolphins; there are less than 10 records from the Kinghorn area in NBN Atlas, mostly from 2022 (NBN Atlas, 2024b). Numerous **Common Starfish** were found washed up at Pettycur on 5th. Many were covered with a black mould-like substance whose identity I have not managed to establish. On land, large numbers of **Common Toads** were out and about on the nights of 17th and 18th around the Burnside Path and elsewhere; some were photographed mating (photos on KDWG Facebook page). Elaine O'Rourke also found a **Common Frog** on 18th.

Other than those from the Loch, I made few plant records around Kinghorn during March as on the few dry non-stormy days I focused my attention on the Loch. In the centre of the older part of the village, **Flowering Currant** (both typical *Ribes sanguineum* and the paler flowered cultivar, 'Lombartsii') and **Alexanders** (*Smyrnium olusatrum*) were





Common Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) buds and flowers, Pettycur, 5th. Photo Robert Mill.

found on 26th and **Yellow Corydalis** (*Pseudofumaria lutea*) was just beginning to flower, apparently earlier than last year. **Coltsfoot** (*Tussilago farfara*) was in bloom along the Burnside Path from at least 5th, several days earlier than first seen at Kinghorn Loch, possibly because of the sun-exposed south-facing bank on which it was growing. **Field Forget-me-not** (*Myosotis arvensis*) was flowering quite abundantly as a weed in the garden of one of the Lochside Grange houses on 24th. **Greater Periwinkle** was in flower at Pettycur on 5th while **Common Scurvy-grass** (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and **Wallflower** (*Erysimum cheiri*) were just beginning to come into flower there on the same date.

## References

- MET OFFICE (2024a). Spring starts with a mild and wet March. <https://blog.metoffice.gov.uk/2024/04/02/spring-starts-with-a-mild-and-wet-march/> accessed 6 April 2024.
- MET OFFICE (2024b). March 2024 Monthly Weather Report. [https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/summaries/mwr\\_2024\\_03\\_for\\_print.pdf](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/summaries/mwr_2024_03_for_print.pdf) Downloaded 6 April 2024.
- NBN ATLAS (2024a). Human observation of *Glyceria notata* Chevall. | Plicate Sweet-grass recorded on 2014-08-15. <https://records.nbnatlas.org/occurrences/072e2fb3-1916-416d-96e1-c49ba13308e4> accessed 6 April 2024.
- NBN ATLAS (2024b). [Records of Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*). <https://species.nbnatlas.org/species/NBNSYS0000005181> accessed 9 April 2024.
- SEPA (2024). Data for the Kinghorn Ecology Centre Rainfall Gauge, available online at <<https://www2.sepa.org.uk/rainfall/>>, accessed 9 April 2024.
- WALLACE, E.C. (comp.) (1965). Plant Records. *Proc. B.S.B.I.* 6: 128-135.
- ZUGMAIER, W., BAUER, R. & OBERWINKLER, F. (1994). Mycoparasitism of some *Tremella* species. *Mycologia* 86(1): 49-56.