

## KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – MARCH 2023 by Robert Mill

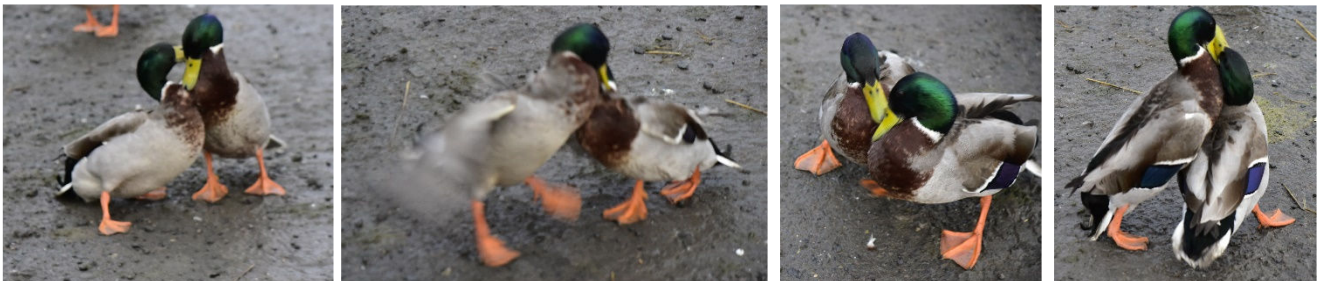


An ichneumon wasp belonging to the *Ophion obscuratus* species aggregate, in The Ecology Centre building, 30 March 2023. New Loch record. Photo Lee Brown.

The first half of March 2023 was dry and cold in Kinghorn with reasonable amounts of sunshine and no rain at all in the first eight days, thanks to persistent high-pressure weather systems over the UK. This abruptly ended on 12th when two days of heavy rain began. The rest of March was much duller and unsettled, being dominated by one Atlantic low-pressure system after another, so that at least a small amount of rain fell every day except 14th and 22nd. The Kinghorn Loch rain gauge collected 97.2 mm of rain during March, 212% of the local March mean rainfall of 45.8 mm (SEPA, 2023); 47.2 mm of that total (3% more than the entire monthly long-term average for Kinghorn!) fell in the deluge of 12th/13th. Unsurprisingly, local sunshine was slightly below the long-term average but, thanks to the mild temperatures that accompanied the rain of the month's second half, local temperatures ended up close to the long-term average (Met Office, 2023).

Another five new records were added to the Loch's list in March 2023. They were 1 ichneumon wasp, 1 centipede and 3 flowering plants. However, one of January's new lichen records has turned out to be a misidentification (see Cryptogams paragraph below) and belongs to a different species that was already on the Loch's list. The total thus increased by four, from 1,481 (28 February 2023) to **1,485** (31 March 2023).

### AROUND THE LOCH



Two drake Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) fighting with beaks locked together amongst the rest of the flock on the Loch launching area, 17th March 2023. Photos Robert Mill.

**Birds:** A total of 62 bird species was recorded at and around Kinghorn Loch during March 2023 while a few others were seen just beyond the Loch recording area. The month saw departures of winter visitors as well as the first arrivals of the new spring season. **Redwings** and **Fieldfares** were reported up till 11th and 15th respectively, unlike last year when both species had left by the end of February. The arrival of the first

**Chiffchaff**, on 19th (Pauline Bell), was also over a week later than last year when this early-arriving warbler was first reported on 11th. **Great Crested Grebes** were present all month; the beginning of courtship between one pair was observed by myself on 14th and the dance by Paul Williams the next day, while Andy Pay and Paul also saw a second pair on 30th and 31st respectively. The month's most interesting **duck** record, if correct, was of a **Gadwall**; unfortunately, this was just listed on the hide's whiteboard with no photo on (for example) the Kinghorn District Wildlife Group's Facebook page that could be used to verify it. The only four records of Gadwall from Kinghorn Loch in the National Biodiversity Network database all date from a narrow period between September 2008 and January 2009 (NBN, 2023), so this sighting would, if confirmed, possibly be the first for just over 14 years. I'd be very grateful if whoever saw this duck could let me know and, if possible, send me a photo [via [admin@theecologycentre.org](mailto:admin@theecologycentre.org), marking the email for the attention of Dr Robert Mill] or put it up on the Kinghorn District Wildlife Group's Facebook page if you have access to that group.

**Pochard** numbers gradually built up in the first half of the month from a single male on 3rd to two on 8th, five males on 9th (Nigel Voaden), six males on 11th (Paul Williams) and finally those six males were joined by four females on 15th (Paul again). Numbers then dropped abruptly to a single male on 17th with none seen for the rest of the month. A single **Shelduck** was spotted on both 10th (Tim Nicholson) and 15th (Paul Williams). Eight **Tufted Ducks** were present on 8th (seen by myself) but only one on 24th (Paul Williams). Small numbers of **Goldeneye** also remained until at least 24th. I rarely if ever mention the resident **Mallards** but on 17th two drakes on the jetty were locked beak-to-beak in combat for several minutes (see photo sequence on previous page). Significant numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** were in the neighbourhood of the Loch mid-month: I saw over 100 circling over the NW area on 14th and 17th while Paul Williams noted more than 200 towards South Glassmount Farm (outside the Loch recording area) on 15th and 150 over Craigenalt Cottage on 24th. The female **Kingfisher** visited the area around the hide throughout March and Nigel Voaden saw a second bird on 9th. **Jay** may also have visited the hide's vicinity during March, according to the list on its whiteboard; Paul Williams did record two on 10th and one on 11th but both these sightings were outside my recording area, in woods near the Rodanbraes ruins. **Curlews** were reported on several dates throughout the month, with 36 seen by Paul Williams on 24th. **Buzzards** were also seen regularly and a male **Kestrel** was seen by Paul Williams on 24th. However, the only local **Sparrowhawk** sighting (by Paul Williams on 3rd) was near South Glassmount Farm which is just outside the area of these monthly reports, as were his records of **Reed Bunting** and **Tawny Owl** from Rodanbraes, also on 3rd. Nevertheless, I heard a **Tawny Owl** calling near the hide on 25th so it was recorded from the Loch area in March. Paul saw three **Ravens** over Craigenalt Cottages on 3rd and heard another on 24th. Also listed on the hide whiteboard but, like the Gadwall record, without any report on Facebook or elsewhere, were **Goldcrest** and **Stonechat**, both of which (particularly the former) are regularly seen around the Loch. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during March 2023 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, Fieldfare, Gadwall (if confirmed), Goldcrest, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Grey Wagtail, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Kingfisher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Pochard, Raven, Redwing, Robin, Rook, Shelduck, Skylark, Song Thrush, Starling, Stonechat, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer*. From beyond the area that I record: *Jay, Reed Bunting, Sparrowhawk*.

**Mammals, amphibians and fish:** Paul Williams saw a **Rabbit** on 3rd while Tim Nicholson saw 20 **Roe Deer** on 9th. As usual, **Grey Squirrels** often visited the feeders at the hide while Jacqueline Davidson photographed a **Stoat** there on 10th. **Mole** hills continued to be seen in various places. March's only **Brown Hare** report was from north of Rodanbraes, outside the Loch recording area, on 10th (Paul Williams).

**Invertebrates ('minibeasts'):** A curious insect found inside The Ecology Centre building by Lee Brown on 30th (see photo, p. 1) turned out to be an **ichneumon wasp** belonging to a difficult species group, the **Ophion obscuratus** aggregate. This was a new Loch record. In some respects (particularly its head and thorax margins,



Pinkish-white variant of Brown-lipped Snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*), 17th March 2023. Photo Robert Mill.

and its long legs) it resembled some crane-fly species but unlike those it had very long antennae, a reddish body and, most importantly, four wings (one pair smaller than the other) rather than two. Queen **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** were flying on 25th. March's second new Loch record was a **centipede** species belonging to the genus *Lithobius* from inside the small polytunnel; a better photo than the one sent to me on 15th (taken by Ben of TEC) is needed before an identification to species level can be made although the most likely possibility is *L. forficatus*, the Common Centipede. Also noted during March was a pink-coloured variant of the highly variable **Brown-Lipped Snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*)**, in a crevice of a wall at Craigenalt Farm (17th).

### Flowering plants and ferns:



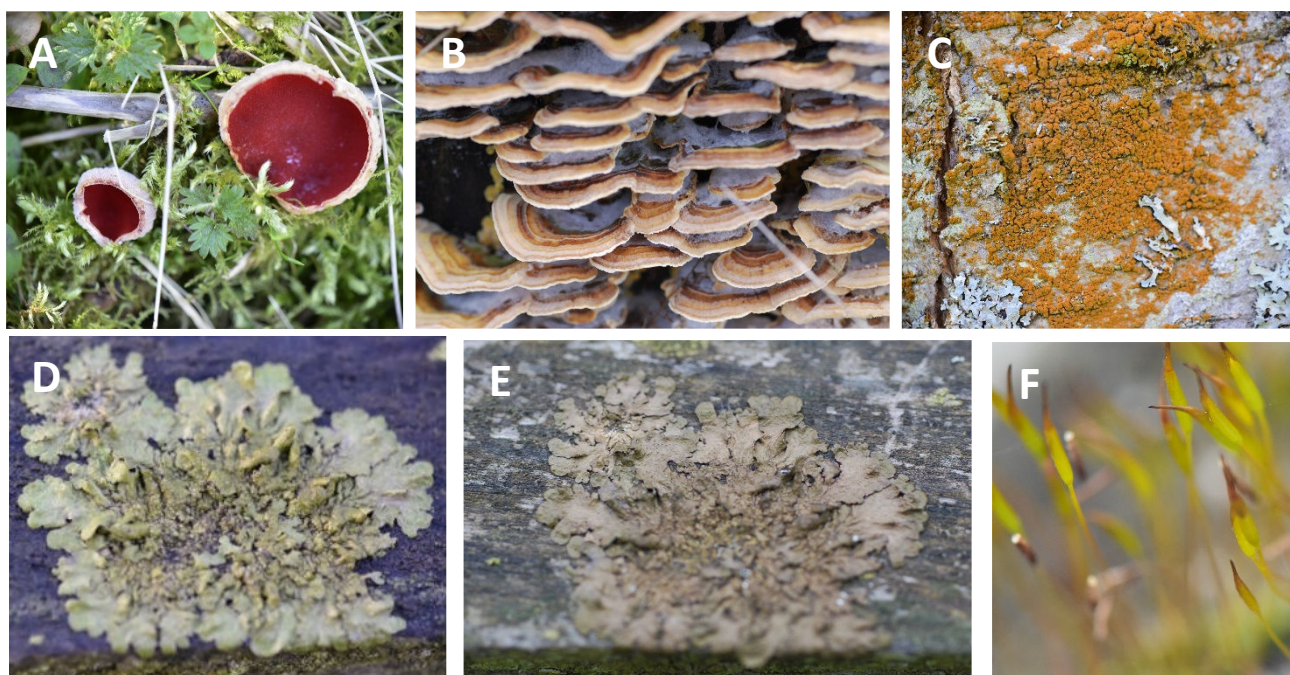
**March flowers around the Loch.** **A**, Common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*), 5th. **B**, Red Lungwort (*Pulmonaria rubra*), 5th. **C**, *Pulmonaria* 'Opal' cultivated in the pollinator bed, 25th. **D**, *Narcissus* 'Jack Snipe', 5th. New Loch record. **E**, *Narcissus* 'February Gold', 8th. New Loch record. **F**, Ivy-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia* subsp. *hederifolia*, 17th. Note blue flowers (not lilac as in subsp. *lucorum*). Photos Robert Mill.

Forty-two wild or naturalised flowering plant species and 13 obviously cultivated ones were noted during my nine visits to the Loch in March. This was a considerable increase in diversity compared with February, but, especially in the colder and dry first half, most of the lochside remained rather devoid of flower colour. Two years after first noticing it, I identified the big **Weeping Willow** opposite Craigenalt water mill as *Salix × sepulcralis* and so could finally add it to the Loch's list. **Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)** was first noted in flower at the Loch on 5th, although I had seen it flowering along the Burnside Path in February. **Dandelions** were first seen on 14th, a day later than last year. Several species appeared to be stimulated to flower by the abrupt change to mild wet weather mid-month: **Glabrous Whitlow-grass (*Erophila glabrescens*)**, **Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)**, **pussy willow (*Salix caprea* or *S. cinerea*: leaves needed for identification)**, **Common Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis* subsp. *boraiei*)**, **Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)**, **Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)**, **Common Field Speedwell (*Veronica persica*)** and **Ivy-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*)** were all first noticed in bloom on 17th. The last-named speedwell has two subspecies in Britain; subsp. *lucorum* has lilac-white flowers while those of the typical subsp. *hederifolia* are blue. My photos this year confirm that the subspecies by the track up to the Farm (the only place I have found it so far) is subsp. *hederifolia*, which is said to be slightly less common than subsp. *lucorum*. **Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis* and possibly other species or**

cultivars) continued flowering all month but **croscuses** were all but finished by the middle. **Glory-of-the-Snow** (*Scilla forbesii*) was first noted on 17th and its relative **Siberian Squill** (*Scilla siberica*) on 25th, while two plants of **Garden Hyacinth** (*Hyacinthus orientalis* cultivar) were re-found in poor condition on 25th – I first found them in spring 2021 but failed to spot them last year. Two Cyclamineus group **daffodil cultivars** growing in ‘wild’ habitats around the Loch were the final two new Loch records for March: *Narcissus* ‘Jack Snipe’ (whitish perianth, yellow trumpet: 5th) and *Narcissus* ‘February Gold’ (all golden yellow: 8th). The two naturalised **lungwort** species known from the Loch, **Common Lungwort** (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) and **Red Lungwort** (*Pulmonaria rubra*), were both first noticed in flower on 5th, while among the cultivated plants *Pulmonaria* ‘Opal’ was in bloom in the pollinator bed. This hybrid has much paler blue flowers and very heavily pale-blotched leaves. All lungworts are good for attracting various species of bumblebee. Although last month I thought that **Winter Aconite** (*Eranthis hyemalis*) had finished flowering by mid-February, I managed to find one plant still in flower, though past its best, on 8 March. Both plants of its close ally **Lenten Rose** remained in flower throughout the month.

During March I conducted an analysis of the UK status of each of the 375 flowering plant species currently recorded as wild or naturalised in ‘natural’ habitats around the Loch (i.e., not deliberately cultivated in special beds or borders), using the data of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2023). Of the 375, 237 are classed as native, 40 are archaeophytes (plants introduced prior to AD1500, including many common arable weeds), 91 are neophytes (plants introduced after AD1500, up to the present day), one (the hybrid between Red and White Campion) is a ‘mixed hybrid’ between a native and an archaeophyte, four are aliens and the status of the remaining two is regarded by BSBI as ‘native or alien’, i.e. doubtful until more information is available. The 277 natives and archaeophytes known from the Loch area have had IUCN threat categories assigned to them. Four of the 237 natives are classed as Near Threatened (NT), two of the 40 archaeophytes as Vulnerable (VU) and all the rest are Least Concern (LC).

### Cryptogams



**A**, Probable Ruby Elf Cups (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*), 8th. **B**, Stacks of young brackets of Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*), 25th. **C**, the terrestrial alga *Trentepohlia abietina* on tree trunk, 8th. **D & E**, the lichen *Melanelixia glabratula* near Craigencait car park, 9 January (D, originally identified as *Flavoparmelia caperata*) and 25 March 2023 (E). Note browner colour in E, which led to the re-determination as *Melanelixia glabratula*. **F**, Wall Screw-moss (*Tortula muralis*), 5th. Photos Robert Mill.

More specimens, in different stages of development, of the **elf cup** fungus (*Sarcoscypha* sp.) discovered last year on the willow carr beyond the marsh were found on 8th. I now think that the most likely of the two possible species is **Ruby Elf Cup** (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*) although, as I stated in March 2022’s report, microscopic characters require to be examined before its true identity can be confirmed. *Trametes versicolor*

was still present at the stumpery, with new young fruiting bodies forming a stack down the side of one stump and older ones being turned greenish by *Trebouxia* epimycotic algae. Numerous different lichens were found, several of which have not yet been identified. Those I did manage to name included **Oakmoss** (*Evernia prunastri*), *Cladonia grayi* and *Verrucaria nigrescens*. The lichen that was the basis for January's record of the Common Greenshield Lichen (*Flavoparmelia caperata*) was photographed again and was found to be noticeably browner than in January, when it had looked greenish. This has led me to conclude that it is not *Flavoparmelia caperata* but is actually the second Loch record of another lichen, *Melanelixia glabratula*, which I found on another fence in 2021 and 2022.

### VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



**A & B**, Common Whitlow-grass (*Erophila verna*), Templars Crescent, 23rd: **A**, whole plant, **B**, flower and stem greatly enlarged showing hairs on stem and sepals. **C**, Glabrous Whitlow-grass (*Erophila glabrescens*), Craigencaft Farm, 17th: flowers and stem enlarged for comparison to show near-absence of hairs. **D & E**, Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*), adjoining coastal path, 6th: **D**, habit; **E**, flowers enlarged. **F**, Alexanders (*Smyrniolum olusatrum*), coastal path, 6th. **G & H**, Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), coastal path, 6th: **G**, typical deep pink form; **H**, pale pink form matching 'Lombartsii'. **J**, Glory-of-the-Snow (*Scilla forbesii*) near Mire Path, 23rd. **K**, Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), Mire Path, 23rd. **L**, Hart's-tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), Mill Burn, 24th. Photos Robert Mill.

A **Little Gull** and a **Mediterranean Gull** were both on Pettycur Sands on 3rd (Fife Bird Club News, Twitter) Graham Sparshott resumed his bird migration watches at East Braes in March ([www.trektellen.org](http://www.trektellen.org)). He noted the return migration of **Pink-footed Geese** with 444 flying NE on 5th and 132 on 19th; 110 **Meadow Pipits** also passed through NE on 19th while on the same date he noted two **Chiffchaffs** newly in among the bushes. Eleven early-returning **Gannets** were there on 12th, as well as 10 **Kittiwakes**. I saw a **Purple Sandpiper** on the rocks at Bellypuff on 6th, while 53 were roosting at high tide at Seafield on 8th (Fife Bird Club on Twitter). Paul Williams recorded 41 species from the Seafield area during March, including **Chiffchaff**, **Gannet**, **Common Guillemot**, **Grey** and **Pied Wagtails**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ringed Plover**, **Rock Pipit**, **Shag** and **Tree Sparrow**. He also noted **Rabbit** and both **Common** and **Grey Seals** there.

On 6th, I walked along the coastal path from Kinghorn to the beach below Linton Court and back. During it, I made what, for me, the month's most interesting plant discovery: four plants of **Stinking Hellebore** (*Helleborus foetidus*) beside the railway just north of the small caravan site beyond the Kirk by the Sea. I also noted two different forms of **Flowering Currant** (*Ribes sanguineum*): the typical one with deep pink flowers and one with much paler flowers which matched the cultivar 'Lombartsii'. **Alexanders** was once again in full bloom while a few flowers also remained on the **Winter Heliotrope** plants near the beach. As well as the **Glabrous Whitlow-grass** (*Erophila glabrescens*) that I re-found at Craigencaft Farm, I also discovered some plants of **Common Whitlow-grass** (*Erophila verna*) by a roadside kerb in Templars Crescent on 23rd, thus confirming that both of the two common British whitlow-grasses occur in the vicinity of Kinghorn. From there I continued towards Abden and walked around Mid Mire. At the small play area at the far end of Glebe Place I found **Slender Speedwell** (*Veronica filiformis*) flowering for the first time in 2023. A well-established plant of **Oregon Grape** (*Mahonia aquifolium*) was in bloom among the gorse bushes by the Mire Path. **Glory-of-the-Snow** (*Scilla forbesii*) was flowering in scrub near the site of the old tip, as well as on 24th along the Burnside Path and by the golf course. Also on 24th, some **Alexanders** plants were in flower by St Leonard's Lane and **Aubrieta** (*Aubrieta deltoidea*) was coming into flower on a wall beside Kilcruik Road.

## References

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