

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – JANUARY 2023 *by Robert Mill*



Frosted grass blades near the sluice, 17 January 2023. Photo Robert Mill.

January 2023 was, both nationally and locally, a month of two halves, or in Kinghorn's case a little more like a sandwich. The first half of the month was mild, wet and often windy, then there was a dry cold spell, and the final few days (and into early February) were milder and wetter again. The cold spell was not long enough or severe enough to break any records and the end result was that, locally and nationally, the month ended up slightly warmer than the long-term (1991-2020) average, though not by much (Met Office, 2023). A total of 49.0 mm of rain or snow was collected at SEPA's rain gauge at Kinghorn Loch during January; 40.4 mm of this (82.4%) fell between 1st and 14th, when some rain fell every day. From 15th-31st there were eleven completely dry days and the only particularly wet day was the last of the month, when 5.6 mm fell. The highest daily totals were 9.2 mm on 13th and 8.0 mm on 3rd. In common with much of the coastal areas of eastern Scotland and England, local rainfall was somewhat below the long-term average for January. On the other hand, sunshine levels in Fife were well above the January 1991-2020 average (Met Office, 2023).

Two new records, a fungus and a lichen, were added to the Loch's list by myself during January 2023. Also, perusal of the report on last year's BSBI Composite Flowers Workshop, held at The Ecology Centre on 6 August 2022, in the recently published 2023 *BSBI Yearbook* (Ansley, 2023) revealed that, as well as finding Bristly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), a new Loch record also found by myself later in the summer, the seven attendees had also recorded **Scented Mayweed (*Matricaria chamomilla*)**, which was another new Loch record for 2022. Thus, the total at 31 January increased by three, from 1,475 (31 December 2022) to **1,478** (31 January 2023).

AROUND THE LOCH



Drake Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), 28 January 2023. Photo Robert Mill.

Birds: Fifty-seven different species were recorded at and around Kinghorn Loch during January 2023. Last month's two North American visitors (Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Duck) did not return but there was still an interesting variety of waterfowl, including **Goldeneye**, **Goosander**, **Pochard** (one on 2nd, two on 30th and an unspecified number on 14th) and **Tufted Duck** as well as, on 5th, two additional visiting **Mute Swans** as well as the pair and juvenile that have been present on the Loch since last year's breeding season. Once again there was an influx of ducks, Coot and other waterfowl during and just before the cold spell in the middle of January. Peak counts for the month were 9 **Cormorant**, 21 **Little Grebe** and over 50 **Coot** (all on 5th, by myself, Jon Penman and Paul Williams respectively) and 40 **Tufted Duck** on 19th (Paul Williams). There was no sign of the juvenile **Great Crested Grebe** that was present until at least 5 December last year, nor of the **Water Rail**. However, three **Common Snipe** were at Rodan Braes on 10th (Andy Pay) and Andy also saw a **Woodcock** there on 15th. No fewer than 57 **Curlew** were feeding in the horse pasture just before the jetty on 5th (Paul Williams; I also saw most of them, counting over 40) and there were also three other records on 2nd, 28th and 30th by either Paul or myself. At least one, occasionally two, **Kingfishers** visited the hide area almost daily. **Birds of prey** included **Buzzard** (2nd, Paul Williams), **Kestrel** (5th, 16th and 30th, Paul Williams, all thought to be of the same male bird; 21st, Paul Bird [Kinghorn District Wildlife Group Facebook page: KDWG]) and **Sparrowhawk** (2nd and 19th, Paul Williams; 30th, Mike Newton [KDWG]). Once again, small numbers of **Fieldfares** (5th, 19th & 30th, Paul Williams; two on 23rd seen by me), **Mistle Thrush** (3rd, Andrea Mill; 5th, myself) and **Redwing** (seven dates) were reported. Andy Pay made several visits to a stubble field at the top of the Rodan Braes which produced several interesting records, including 3 **Reed Bunting** on 10th and 13th, 3 **Common Snipe** on 10th, 11 **Skylarks** on 13th and 13 on 23rd, 11 **Yellowhammers** on 24th as well as one on 13th, and four **Grey Partridges** on 30th. Reed Bunting, Skylarks and Yellowhammers were also seen nearer the Loch on other occasions by different observers; for example, I counted a flock of about 25 Skylarks flying southwards over the east end of the horse pasture, the exits of the two access roads, Red Path Brae and Lochside Grange on 19th. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch (including species seen only at Rodan Braes: marked *) during January 2023 is: *Blackbird*, *Black-headed Gull*, *Blue Tit*, *Bullfinch*, *Buzzard*, *Carrion Crow*, *Chaffinch*, *Coal Tit*, *Common Gull*, *Coot*, *Cormorant*, *Curlew*, *Dabchick (Little Grebe)*, *Dunnock*, *Farmyard / hybrid geese*, *Feral Pigeon*, *Fieldfare*, *Goldcrest*, *Goldeneye*, *Goldfinch*, *Goosander*, *Great Spotted Woodpecker*, *Great Tit*, *Greenfinch*, *Grey Heron*, *Grey Partridge**, *Greylag Goose*, *Herring Gull*, *Jackdaw*, *Jay*, *Kestrel*, *Kingfisher*, *Lesser Black-backed Gull*, *Long-tailed Tit*, *Magpie*, *Mallard*, *Mistle Thrush*, *Moorhen*, *Mute Swan*, *Oystercatcher*, *Pheasant*, *Pochard*, *Redwing*, *Reed Bunting*, *Robin*, *Rook*, *Siskin*, *Skylark*, *(Common) Snipe**, *Sparrowhawk*, *Treecreeper*, *Tree Sparrow*, *Tufted Duck*, *Wood Pigeon*, *Woodcock**, *Wren*, *Yellowhammer*.

Mammals, amphibians and fish: Grey Squirrels were at the hide on 3rd, 5th, 8th, 23rd and 26th at least, while fresh Mole hills were noticed at various spots throughout the month.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): As in December 2022, no invertebrates were recorded at the Loch during January.

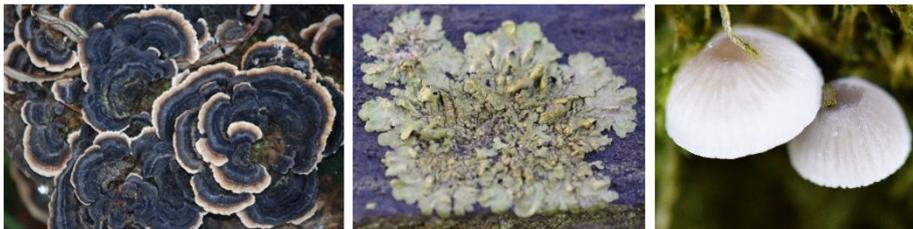


A small plant of Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) on a stone wall, 9 January 2023. Photo Robert

Flowering plants and ferns: Common Polypody and Maidenhair Spleenwort were seen in their usual places during January while a previously unnoticed very small plant of Hart's-tongue Fern was found on a wall up at the Farm (9th) – not a new Loch record, as there is also a plant elsewhere on the site, although it seems to be very uncommon at the Loch, though quite frequent in the village. The only six non-cultivated flowering plants recorded in January on the site prior to the cold spell mid-month were Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*), Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*), Water Avens (*Geum rivale*) and Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Of these, only the first two (Gorse and Groundsel) were also noted flowering after the cold weather, which also presumably caused the Chinese Mugwort (*Artemisia verlotiorum*) to finally die back, as observed

on my visit on 28th. In addition, Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) began flowering from 28th, and cultivated heather (*Calluna vulgaris*, 9th onwards) and *Viburnum x bodnantense* (23rd) were also found.

Cryptogams

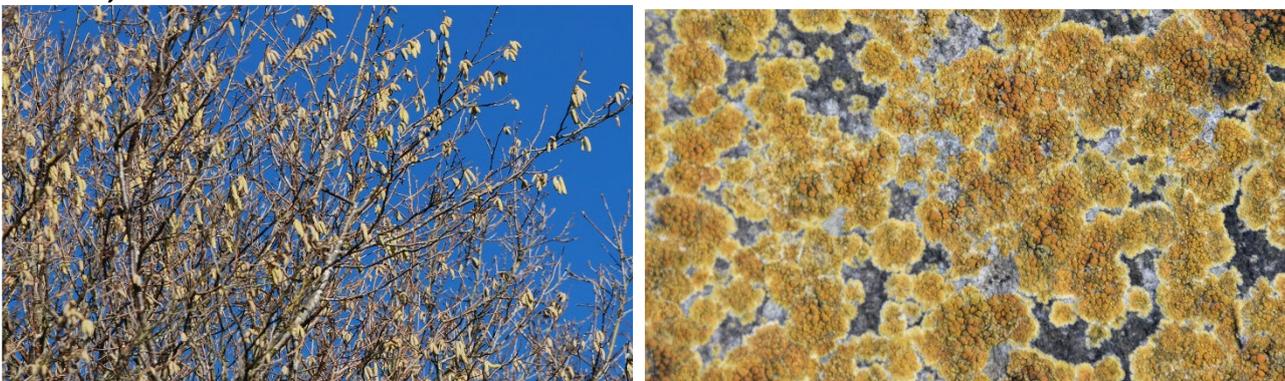


Left: Very dark variant of Turkeytail fungus (*Trametes versicolor*), 9 January 2023. **Centre:** Common Greenshield Lichen (*Flavoparmelia caperata*) on fence spar, 9 January 2023. New Loch record. **Right:** a bonnet fungus (*Mycena* sp.) on mossy tree-trunk, 5 January 2023. New Loch record. Photos Robert Mill.

A very blackish variant of the extremely variable Turkeytail bracket fungus (*Trametes versicolor*) was found on the stumpery (9th) while Conifer Mazegill (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*) began to die off for this season on the logs near the entrance to the nursery. One of Britain's many species of bonnet fungi (*Mycena* spp.)

was found on a mossy tree-trunk by the lochside on 5th; no species of this genus had previously been found around the Loch. At least seven different lichens were found, one of which, Common Greenshield Lichen (*Flavoparmelia caperata*) was the only other new Loch record actually made during January 2023.

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



Left: Hazel catkins (*Corylus avellana*), near Mid Mire, 30 January 2023. **Right:** Thalli of the lichen *Flavoplaca marina* forming colonies on rocks at Kinghorn harbour, 26 January 2023. Photos Robert Mill.

The most notable local scarce bird species recorded in January was a first-winter Iceland Gull at Seafield Tower (18th and 20th, Paul Williams; photos on KDWG Facebook page). In total, Paul recorded 47 bird species

at Seafield and that part of the coastal path during January. Apart from the Iceland Gull, his other highlights were a **Mediterranean Gull** on 22nd, a high count of more than 125 **Goldeneye** on 20th, and a high count (for the month in that area) of seven **Bar-tailed Godwits** on 2nd.

Graham Sparshott's five bird migration watches from East Braes in January (<https://www.trektellen.org>) yielded relatively few unusual records. Three **Wigeon** flew SW on 6th and a **Velvet Scoter** NE on 15th. There were some moderately large movements of **gulls** on most dates, with the biggest being 170 **Herring Gull** SW on 15th. A few **Herring Gulls** of the Scandinavian race *argentatus* continued to linger.

The first **Fulmars** began to return to their breeding cliff at the back of Kinghorn bay (3rd, Tim Nicholson, KDWG) and I counted 9 there on 26th. **Long-tailed Ducks** were seen offshore on various occasions throughout the month and drakes were heard calling off the little beach below Linton Court (the old poorhouse site between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower) on 24th. A few **Purple Sandpipers** were also present on the beach there that day, with some **Turnstones**. Seven **Waxwings** (*Bombycilla garrulus*), beautiful mostly cinnamon coloured winter visitors from Scandinavia, were in a tree on Pettycur Road on 15th (Anne Smith/Andy Pay, KDWG Facebook page).

Also on 26th, I photographed some of the lichens on the rocks forming the north side of the harbour wall. I was fascinated by the abstract patterns formed by the hundreds of thalli of a white-edged but mainly orange lichen called *Flavoplaca marina*. There was also a much less frequent, mostly white lichen that I have not yet identified.

On 30th, I circumnavigated Mid Mire and noted a **hazel** tree (*Corylus avellana*) on the north side that was laden with catkins shedding pollen – the first I had seen in the Kinghorn area this year, although I had seen another tree on the northern outskirts of Kirkcaldy the previous day. A **Buzzard** was seen on the east side, initially over woodland near North Mire and then soaring and mewing nearer to Abden Farm.

References

- ANSLEY, F. (2023). Composite Flowers Workshop, Kinghorn (v.c. 85), 6 August [2022]. *BSBI Yearbook* 2023: 85. Botanical Society of the British Isles.
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- SEPA (2023). Data for the Kinghorn Ecology Centre Rainfall Gauge, available online at <<https://www2.sepa.org.uk/rainfall/>>, accessed 2 February 2023.