

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – FEBRUARY 2023 by Robert Mill



Lenten Rose in woodland in near-darkness just after 6 p.m., 27 February 2023. Photo Robert Mill. Tech info: Nikon D810 with 85mm macro lens, hand-held, no flash, 1/13 second, f3.8 at 12,800 ASA.

High pressure dominated the weather during most of February 2023 although there was a short spell around the 8th-10th of very windy weather with very strong wind chill, as well as a short wet spell from 16th-18th. In the first half of the month the high pressure was centred over southern England but in the last week of the month a new high pressure system became anchored over Scotland which at the time of writing this in early March was still influencing the weather. The rainfall gauge at Kinghorn Loch collected only 28.6 mm of rain during the month, a little than 46% of the long-term average for the site (SEPA, 2023), in common with nearly the whole of eastern Scotland whose rainfall was well below average (Met Office, 2023). Significant amounts of rain only fell at Kinghorn on four days (1st, 16th-18th), with 2 mm or less falling on another nine; all other days were completely dry. Just under half of February's rain (12.6 mm) fell on a single day, the 17th (SEPA, 2023). February was also a dull month with a lot of cloud, resulting in sunshine in eastern Fife only being between 50-70% of the long-term average. Despite this, Scotland apparently had its third mildest February on record, although sometimes it did not appear so while I was out and about!! (Met Office, 2023).

During February, another three new records were added to the Loch's list, which thereby increased from 1,478 (31 January 2023) to **1,481** (28 February 2023). They were 1 bird, 1 flowering plant and 1 fungus.

I had an interesting email during the month from a friend in Edinburgh, Ken Dobson, who used to send in wildlife records from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh when I kept its biodiversity records and wrote monthly reports for its website, similar to those I now prepare for The Ecology Centre. He himself had recorded a **butterfly** species during 2022 that was new to the RBGE's biodiversity list: **Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*)**. This is apparently expanding its range rapidly northwards; now that it has reached the Botanic Garden, it would be only a short, easy flight across the Forth to Kinghorn (which lies more or less directly opposite) for this strong-flying butterfly. It likes to fly around tall grasses and the main larval foodplant is a common grass, Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), which does grow around the Loch. It should therefore be watched out for around the Loch. Ken also drew my attention to a second beautiful butterfly

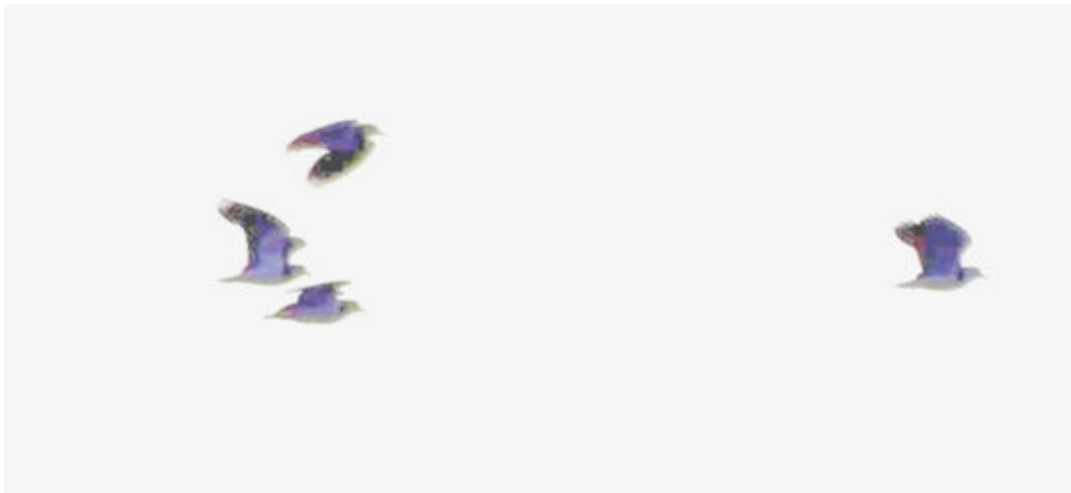


Left: Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*). Photo James Lindsey at Ecology of Commanster, CC BY-SA 2.5 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

Right: Purple Hairstreak (*Favonius quercus*). Photo Hedwig Storch, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

species that had also been recorded at the RBGE for the first time during 2022: **Purple Hairstreak (*Favonius quercus*)**, recorded by another observer in August. This is another species whose range seems to be expanding; there are quite a lot of records from west-central Scotland as far east as about Stirling but only one record so far from Fife, somewhere near Glenrothes, as well as some from Tayside. Its food plant is Oak and the adults fly around the canopy of oak trees: even a single oak tree can apparently support a population. As we do have some oak trees around the Loch, particularly near The Ecology Centre, and TEC staff and volunteers are currently planting many more oaks around the Loch, this is another species that ought to be looked for now or in the future, although it is difficult to spot since the butterflies fly high up around the tree canopy.

AROUND THE LOCH



Four Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) flying over the Loch towards Rodanbraes, 6th. New Loch record. Photo Paul Williams.

Birds: In February 2023, 59 bird species were recorded at and around Kinghorn Loch. One of them, four **Lapwings** seen flying over the Loch on 6th by Paul Williams, was a new Loch record and brings the total number of birds recorded up to 120. The month's other main highlight was a single **Shelduck** seen by myself on 27th on one of the pipe-like structures floating on the south bank; unfortunately, it took off before I could take a photograph. Small numbers of **Goldeneye** and **Tufted Ducks** lingered throughout the month, and there were two drake **Pochards** on 3rd and single ones on 22nd and 28th. Numbers of **Cormorant**, **Little Grebe** and **Coot** were much lower than at their January peaks. However, one **Great Crested Grebe** returned at the end of

the month and was seen by myself on 27th and by Paul Williams the following day. A female **Kingfisher** was seen near the hide on numerous dates throughout February, with a male companion sometimes present, as on 25th (Jacqueline Davidson, Kinghorn District Wildlife Group [KDWG]) and 26th (Derek Chappell, KDWG). A **Jay** also visited the hide area on 15th, with two seen there by Pauline Bell [KDWG] on 27th. Paul Williams counted 27 **Curlew** on 6th while I saw 11 on 3rd. **Buzzard** was recorded by Paul Williams on 1st and by Pauline Bell on 5th, while on 6th a female **Sparrowhawk** darted out from the willows and followed the line of the water channel in front of the hide to the Loch. On the same day I heard a **Tawny Owl** near the hide. At least 12 **Fieldfares** were in a field above Craigenalt Farm near the cottages on 20th and **Redwings** were also present until at least 22nd. Paul Williams saw a **Siskin** in an Alder tree by the lochside on 1st, a **Reed Bunting** on 6th and 13th, and **Skylark** on 6th and 22nd. **Yellowhammers** were seen by Paul or myself on four dates, with three near The Ecology Centre's access road on 3rd. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during February 2023 is: *Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Common Gull, Coot, Cormorant, Curlew, Dabchick (Little Grebe), Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Fieldfare, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Jay, Kingfisher, Lapwing (new Loch record), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Oystercatcher, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pochard, Redwing, Reed Bunting, Robin, Rook, Shelduck, Siskin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Starling, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

Mammals, amphibians and fish: Lee Brown (TEC) saw a **Stoat** near The Ecology Centre on 6th while Paul Williams saw **Brown Hare** on 6th and 15th, **Rabbit** on 6th and **Roe Deer** on 28th. **Grey Squirrels** once again visited the feeders at the hide on several occasions and **Mole** hills continued to be seen in various places.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): **Honey Bees** from The Ecology Centre's beehives were seen flying on 6th and other occasions by Lee Brown (TEC). However, no other invertebrates were spotted around the Loch during February.

Flowering plants and ferns: Seventeen wild or naturalised flowering plant species and seven obviously cultivated ones were noted during my four February visits. **Snowdrops** (*Galanthus nivalis* and possibly other species or cultivars) were flowering throughout the month. **Winter Aconite** (*Eranthis hyemalis*) was first seen on 3rd but seemed to have a very short flowering period as I did not see any on my last two visits on 20th and 27th. **Hazel** catkins were seen by the TEC access road (3rd) and **Alder** catkins by the lochside from 20th. **Daffodils** were first seen flowering on 6th. Some unusually early-flowering **Primroses** were noticed at the back of the orchard beside the track to Craigenalt Farm (20th), much too far away to be photographed. Also in the second half of the month, other spring bulbs came into flower, mainly different types of **crocus**; cultivars of **Dutch Yellow Crocus** (*Crocus flavus*) were a previously overlooked new Loch record that last year I had lumped together with the purple or white **Spring Crocus** (*Crocus vernus*). These and **Crocus chrysanthus** cultivars were all flowering on the lawn area by the boats overlooking the east shore of the Loch. **Lenten Rose** (*Helleborus orientalis*) was photographed in flower when it was practically dark just after 6 p.m. on 27th. Despite the almost impossible conditions for photography, I was rather pleased with the result (see page 1).

Cryptogams



Pseudocercospora viburnigena, a leaf-spot fungus found on cultivated *Viburnum tinus* on 6th, was February's third new Loch record. **Turkeytail** bracket fungus (*Trametes versicolor*) was still common at the stumpery (9th), with some of the brackets now tinged green due to an epimycotic alga (i.e., one that grows on fungi). Seven **lichens** were recorded, including **Cladonia fimbriata** and **Peltigera hymenina** growing together on a low wall just south of the TEC car park where I had found them in previous years.

A leaf spot,
Pseudocercospora
viburnigena, on
Viburnum tinus, 6
February 2023.
New Loch record.
Photo Robert Mill.

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



TOP ROW. Left: Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*), coastal path, 7th. **Centre:** Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) flowering early, 17th. **Right:** Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), Burnside Path, 22nd. **BOTTOM ROW. Left:** *Ramularia purpurascens* leaf spot on Winter Heliotrope, 7th. **Centre:** Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) buds beginning to open, Golf Course, 22nd. **Right:** Field Speedwell (*Veronica persica*), Burnside Path, 22nd. Photos Robert Mill.

Two **Mediterranean Gulls** were on Pettycur Sands on 16th (Fife Bird Club News) and Tim Nicholson (KDWG) saw one at Seafield on 20th. I saw about 80 **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the sea off Pettycur Bay heading towards Kinghorn on the afternoon of 14th. Smaller numbers were seen off the coastal path on various dates. Some **Dunlin** were on the beach at Bellypuff (just N of the caravan site) on 7th while a **Purple Sandpiper** was on the beach below Linton Court that day along with **Turnstones, Redshanks** and a **Grey Heron**. Nearer Kinghorn that afternoon I saw a **Black-throated Diver**, while Bruce Meldrum (KDWG) photographed a **Great Northern Diver** off the coastal path (10th) as well as **Long-tailed Ducks** on 20th. Numbers of **Fulmars** on the Kinghorn cliffs seemed to fluctuate, with only two present on 12th but 10 on 26th. Graham Sparshott did not submit any bird records from East Braes to the usual website (www.trektellen.org) in February. However, on a walk along the coastal path from Kinghorn to the beach below Linton Court on 7th I noted three **Dunlin** as well as some **Purple Sandpipers** and **Turnstones**, and a **Black-throated Diver** offshore. Paul Williams recorded 38 species from the Seafield area, including **Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Grey and Pied Wagtails, Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper, Red-breasted Merganser, Reed Bunting, Rock Pipit** and **Shag**. I noticed at least one large **Brown Hare** in the field with the Ordnance Survey trig point just north of the Mire Path's junction with the Kissing Trees road on 20th.

On 17th I noticed some remarkably early flowers on **Broom** bushes next to the east side of the Golf Course. **Coltsfoot** was in bloom along the Burnside Path (17th) and Mire Path (20th) and **Field Speedwell** along the Burnside Path (17th, 22nd). **Blackthorn** bushes were just beginning to open flower buds near the Golf Clubhouse (22nd). Along the coastal path on 7th, **Winter Heliotrope** was in bloom but there was little change in the state of the **Alexanders** plants since January, with well-developed leaves but no flowers.

References

MET OFFICE (2023). Driest February in 30 years for England. <<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2023/february-and-winter-stats>> accessed 2 March 2023.

SEPA (2023). Data for the Kinghorn Ecology Centre Rainfall Gauge, available online at <<https://www2.sepa.org.uk/rainfall/>>, accessed 2 March 2023.