

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – APRIL 2023 by Robert Mill



Left: Male catkins of Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*), 2 April 2023. New Loch record. **Right:** Common Dog Lichen (*Peltigera membranacea*, 21 April 2023. New Loch record. Photos Robert Mill.

According to the Met Office's April summary (Met Office, 2023), April 2023 in our area was a very average month. Milder days were balanced by cooler and often decidedly chilly conditions. Daily maximum temperatures were below or at the long-term average on 1st-4th, 11th-13th, 23rd-27th and 29th, and above average on 5th-10th, 14th-22nd, 28th and 30th. Rain fell at The Ecology Centre's rain gauge (managed by SEPA) on 13 days out of the 30, with the total recorded being 31.6 mm, 2 mm or 6.7% above the long-term average for that gauge. Almost half that total, 15.4 mm, fell on two days near the middle of the month: 8.2 mm on 11th and 7.2 mm on 13th (SEPA, 2023). This was during the period when Storm Noa was affecting the UK – it brought very strong winds to southern England but eastern Scotland escaped these though not the rain. The final week was also unsettled with rain on most days but in between there was a lovely sunny and dry spell from 15th-22nd. Local sunshine, however, ended up average for the time of year (Met Office, 2023). Possibly on account of poor weather, only one person (Roger Barnes, eBird; birds only) made any records at the Loch after the 21st until the start of May, so this report mainly covers the first three weeks, as far as the Loch is concerned.

The cool conditions definitely slowed the onset of spring around the village generally and, it seemed, especially at the Loch, where quite a few wildflower species that had begun to flower in the wider Kinghorn area by the middle of April had not even started flowering at the Loch by the 21st though a few found in flower on 1 May must have started after 21 April. These included species such as **Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*)**, **Lesser Pond Sedge (*Carex acutiformis*)**, **Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*)** and **Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)**. Compared with the last couple of years, many species took a complete winter rest from flowering, instead of continuing in bloom through what are normally the coldest months of the year, and did not start until mid or late April.

Seven new records were added to the Loch's list during April: 1 lichen and six flowering plants. However, March's record of probable **Common Centipede** was relegated to 'uncertain' and removed from the grand total, for the meantime at least, because a different centipede species was found in early May which will be mentioned in next month's report. Also, the status at the Loch of one flowering plant (**Poppy Anemone, *Anemone coronaria***), which was treated as a new record last year, was changed from 'Introduced' to 'Cultivated' and (unless it turns up in a wild situation in the future) has been removed from the list, which excludes non-native garden plants that are obviously being deliberately cultivated rather than either naturalized in a wild setting or that have 'escaped' from where they have been planted. Thus, by 30 April, there was a net increase of five species, from 1,485 at the end of March to **1,490**.

AROUND THE LOCH Birds:

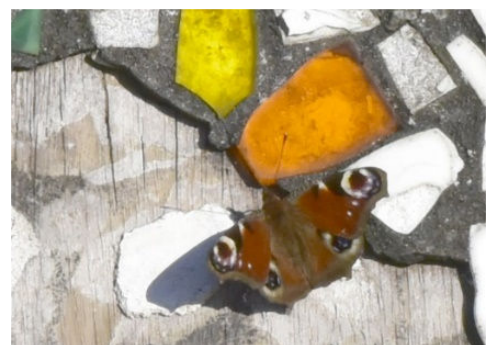


Male Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) with vole prey, 17th. Photo Paul Williams.

A total of 55 bird species was recorded at and around Kinghorn Loch during April 2023, seven fewer than in March but still a pretty respectable total. All the winter visitors had left by the end of the first week of the month: the final **Goldeneye** record was on 3rd by Paul Williams. Spring migrants began trickling in. Other than **Chiffchaffs**, which as usual had arrived last month, the first to arrive were **Sand Martins** from 3rd, much earlier than last year's first sighting at the Loch on 26th; numbers built up to a high count of 22 on 26th (Roger Barnes). **Blackcap** (10th) and **Swallow** (11th) arrival dates were also slightly earlier than in 2022 when both were first noted on 13th. Finally, **Common Whitethroat** was first reported on 11th by Paul Williams, 18 days earlier than last year. These earlier arrival dates are interesting but somewhat worrying, contrasting as they do with the later

start-of-flowering dates for many of the Loch's plant species this year and the possible lack of enough insect prey for many of the migrants. **Great Crested Grebes** were present all month and incubation had begun on a nest near the hide by the end. **Dabchicks (Little Grebes)** also remained in small numbers until at least 20th. **Pochard** was not seen in April but a single **Shelduck** was spotted at least once (3rd, Paul Williams). **Tufted Duck** was seen on 4th by myself and on 11th by Paul Williams. There was one record of **Kingfisher**, on 2nd (Colin Mitchell, Kinghorn District Wildlife Group [KDWG] Facebook page) which I thought might be the last but as I write it has been seen in May. **Curlew** was reported only once (3rd, Paul Williams). **Buzzards** were reported on six occasions and a male **Kestrel** was seen by Paul Williams on both 11th and 17th; on the latter date he photographed it with a vole in its talons. I saw a **Raven** on 11th near where the 'Great North Road' track meets the B923 at the southwest corner of my Loch recording area. Roger Barnes counted 33 **Starlings** and 13 **Feral Pigeons** on 26th, both high numbers for the Loch. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during April 2023 is: *Blackbird, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Common Whitethroat, Coot, Cormorant, Curlew, Dabchick (Little Grebe), Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Goldcrest, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, 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, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Raven, Robin, Sand Martin, Shelduck, Skylark, Song Thrush, Starling, Swallow, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Willow Warbler, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

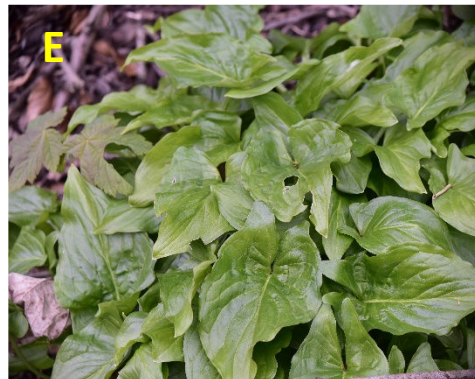
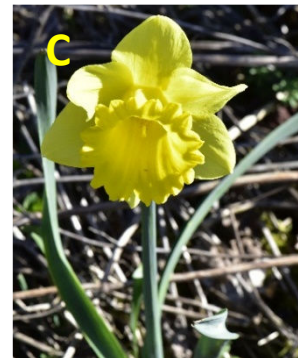
Mammals, amphibians and fish: Paul Williams saw a **Brown Hare** on 3rd and **Grey Squirrels** visited the hide's feeders (2nd, Jacqueline Davidson). **Mole** hills were present all month. No **amphibians** were noted.



Left Caterpillar of Dark Arches moth (*Apamea monoglypha*), 2nd. Centre: Chocolate Mining Bee (*Andrena scotica*), 21st. Right: Peacock (*Inachis io*) on mosaic, 7th. Photos Robert Mill.

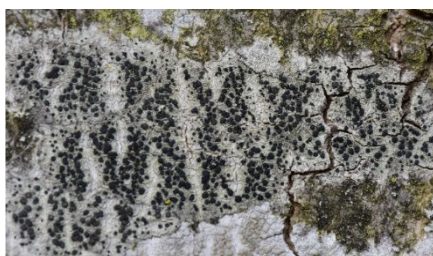
Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): The mostly cool weather (whether sunny or cloudy) once again had an adverse effect on invertebrate numbers and diversity. The year's first **butterfly** records were of **Peacock** (at least six on 7th, also seen on 21st and 22nd) and **Small White** (one on 20th, Paul Williams). My wife Andrea drew my attention on 2nd to a caterpillar that she had spotted on the ground just behind The Ecology Centre's car park; this turned out to be that of the **Dark Arches moth**. No moth trapping was possible during April. **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** were around most days, but **Common Carder Bee**, which is usually very tolerant of inclement weather, was only seen twice (7th and 21st). **Honey Bee** was also seen on 21st, and a **Chocolate Mining Bee** was photographed by a hole in the dyke alongside the Great North Road on the same day. **Common Wasp** was also spotted on 21st. No **hoverflies** were seen at all and the only other **fly** records were also made on 21st: **Greater Bee-fly** and **Common Bluebottle**. **Common Pollen Beetle** was found inside a dandelion flower-head on 11th but no **bugs** or other insects reported, nor indeed any other invertebrates.

Flowering plants and ferns:



April flowers around the Loch. **A**, *Narcissus* 'Ice Follies', 4th, new Loch record. **B**, *Narcissus* 'Golden Harvest', 4th, new Loch record. **C**, *Narcissus* 'Gigantic Star', 7th, new Loch record. **D**, Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) 'Robinsoniana', 17th, new Loch record. **E**, Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*), 11th. **F**, Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*), 17th. Photos Robert Mill.

85 wild or naturalised flowering plant species, five ferns, one horsetail and around 30 obviously cultivated flowering plants were noted during my April visits to the Loch. Five represented new Loch records although only one was a British native: **Goat Willow** (*Salix caprea*). The others were garden plants in wild situations or at least naturalised: three *Narcissus* cultivars ('Gigantic Star' and 'Ice Follies' on 4th; 'Golden Harvest' on 7th), various colour forms of cultivated **Tulip** (*Tulipa x gesneriana*: 15th onwards) and a pale lavender cultivar of wild **Wood Anemone**, *Anemone nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana' (or similar cv.) on 17th. Additional sites around the Loch were found for a few locally scarce species such as **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** (*Veronica hederifolia* subsp. *hederifolia*) on 21st and **Lords-and-Ladies** (*Arum maculatum*) on 11th, which, however, was not in flower at either of the two sites now known. **Hybrid Bluebell** (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*) began flowering from 4th while the native British species (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) was not noted in flower there until 21st. Selected other first-flowering dates were **Common Wintercress** (*Barbarea vulgaris*), 10th (2022, 1st); **Marsh Marigold** (*Caltha palustris*), 11th (2022, 18th); **Water Avens** (*Geum rivale*), first 'normal' flowering of 2023, 11th (it was also in flower very early in the year, as a continuation of the 2022 season; 2022, 23rd); **Osier** (*Salix viminalis*: 2022, May 22nd), 15th; **Ground Ivy** (*Glechoma hederacea*), 21st (2022, same date) and **Red Campion** (*Silene dioica*), 17th (2022, Jan 17th); **Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*), **Charlock** (*Sinapis arvensis*), **Borage** (*Borago officinalis*), **Dove's-foot Cranesbill** (*Geranium molle*), **Herb Robert** (*Geranium robertianum*), all on 21st (2022 respectively Apr 18th, Feb 25th, Jan 28th, Mar 21st, Jan 20th).



Amandinea punctata, 4th. Photo Robert Mill.

Cryptogams The usual trio of frequently recorded **terrestrial algae** – *Desmococcus olivaceus* (green, on tree trunks, fence posts and telegraph poles), *Trentepohlia aurea* (dull orange-brown on dry-stone dykes) and *Trentepohlia abietina* (brighter orange on tree trunks) -- were all recorded again in April. Four **fungi** were recorded, including **Campion Anther Smut** which must be systemic since it was seen on more-or-less the same day as the first **Red Campion** flowers (21st; flowers first seen on 17th). At least ten different **lichens** were found, including **Common Dog Lichen** (*Peltigera membranacea*) on 21st (new Loch record: photo p. 1) and *Amandinea punctata* (4th).

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



Left: Pale-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*), Seafield, 4th. Photo Paul Williams. **Right:** Zebra Spider (*Salticus scenicus*), Pettycur, 21st. Photo Andy Pay.

The month's two main **bird** highlights were two **Pintail** at East Braes on 2nd (Graham Sparshott) and a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** at Seafield (4th, seen by both Paul Williams and Pauline Bell – photo at top of this page). Graham Sparshott carried out bird migration watches at East Braes on four dates in the first half of the month (www.trektellen.org). The last departing winter visitors included 70 **Pink-footed Geese** and five **Whooper Swans** on 2nd, when a **Canada Goose** was also seen there. He saw up to four **Red-throated Divers** on 2nd, 9th and 10th and a **Black-throated Diver** on 2nd. He recorded small numbers of **Black-headed** and **Common Gulls** (both of which were absent from Kinghorn Loch in April) at East Braes on 2nd and 9th, with a single Black-headed Gull also there on 14th. Both species have gone away to breed and will not return in big numbers for some weeks. **Fulmars** were on the cliffs at both Kinghorn (up to about 20 birds) and Pettycur (just three pairs seen by me and my wife on 18th), while Graham Sparshott noted 17 **Kittiwakes** at East Braes on 9th. Eleven early-returning **Gannets** were there on 12th, as well as 10 **Kittiwakes**. **Long-tailed Ducks** lingered off Kinghorn and the coastal path until at least 16th, by which time they had moulted into breeding plumage. A **Purple Sandpiper** was on the rocks on the beach below Linton Court on 12th. Paul Williams recorded 39 species from the Seafield area during April, including four **Sanderling** on 12th as well as **Common Guillemot, Eider, Fulmar, Gannet, Linnet, Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper, Red-breasted Merganser, Ringed Plover, Shag, Sparrowhawk** and **Turnstone**.

Paul Williams noted **Rabbit** and both **Common** and **Grey Seals** at Seafield during April, while I saw a **Brown Hare** at Mid Mire on 7th. Pods (or the same pod) of **Bottlenose Dolphins** were off Kinghorn beach on 14th (superb photos by Bruce Meldrum on KDWG Facebook page) and also on 27th when they were seen by Ronnie Mackie as well as my wife Andrea. I have also just become aware of a record of a **Humpback Whale** off Kinghorn on 10 March, and also sightings of between one and five **Harbour Porpoises** at Kinghorn on 10th, 11th, 15th and 30th March (Seawatch Foundation, 2023).

As well as the six **Peacock** butterflies seen at the Loch on 7th, I saw three at Mid Mire that day and one at Pettycur, together with a **Small White**, on 18th; Paul Williams recorded another **Peacock** at Seafield on 4th. A **Greater Bee-fly** was visiting Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) flowers in scrub east of Mid Mire on 7th. Andy Pay photographed a **Zebra Spider** at Pettycur on 21st (see top of this page).

I made several excursions in the village, along the coastal path and elsewhere in search of flowering plants. There were some striking differences in the start-of-flowering dates for a variety of species between the Loch and the wider area, with the Loch consistently being later (often considerably so). Examples include **Shining Cranesbill** (*Geranium lucidum*), 3rd along the Doo Dell paths above Kinghorn beach, 1 May (probably slightly earlier, at the end of April) at the Loch; **Spring Beauty** (*Claytonia perfoliata*), 11th along the golf course track vs. 17th at the Loch; **Strawberry** (*Fragaria vesca*), just starting to bloom on the coastal path on 12th, not in flower until May at the Loch; **Bluebell** (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), 12th on the coastal path, 21st at Loch; **Field Forget-me-not** (*Myosotis arvensis*), 3rd at Doo Dell Paths, not in flower until May at the Loch.



A, Starflower (*Tristagma uniflorum*), Burnside Path, 20th. Possibly new Fife and Scottish record. **B**, Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*), near Mire Path, 7th. **C**, Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Seafield, 12th. **D**, Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*), beach below Linton Court, 12th. **E**, Common Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*), clifftop adjoining coastal path, 12th. **F**, Early Forget-me-not (left ¼ of photo) and Common Cornsalad (right ¼) growing together, coastal path, 12th. **G**, Yellow Figwort (*Scrophularia vernalis*), Pettycur, 18th. **H**, Bugloss (*Lycopsis arvensis*), mass in bloom at Pettycur, 18th: inset top right, flowers. **J**, Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Pettycur, 18th. Photos Robert Mill.

My most interesting discovery of the month was a single plant of **Starflower** (*Tristagma uniflorum*, also known as *Ipheion uniflorum*) in bloom amongst thistles and arable weeds beside the Burnside Path on 20th. This is an increasingly frequent garden escape, particularly in southern England, but as yet there are no previous records from Scotland so the Kinghorn plant could be the first for both Fife and Scotland. The one found was pure white; I am familiar with the species, which was cultivated (as the more typical pale blue form) at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh where I used to work for many years until 'retirement'.

During April I found two plant species for the first time since moving to Kinghorn two years ago that were both familiar to me from my long time in Edinburgh. One was **Butterbur** (*Petasites hybridus*), of which I first



Wall plants in and around Kinghorn. Left and centre: Annual Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*): **Left**, growing horizontally out of a wall next to the A921 north of Kinghorn, 19th; **Centre**, against the wall between Kinghorn harbour and the Kirk by the Sea, 20th. **Right**, Yellow Corydalis (*Pseudofumaria lutea*), wall in village, 12th. Photos Robert Mill.

discovered a sizeable patch on the cliffs by the Doo Dell path on 3rd. I then found an even larger colony to the east of the south end of the Mire Path (7th and 10th) where it was proving popular with bumblebees. Finally, I found several hundred yards of it along the farm track from the main A921 Kirkcaldy road to Grange Farm on 19th. The second species was **Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*)**, a patch of which was in bloom on the seaward side of the coastal path by the slope down from Seafield Tower (12th).

Along the coastal path on 12th, I found additional plants of **Stinking Hellebore** where I first discovered it in March and I am now aware of at least eight plants. **Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*)** was in bloom there on 12th, as well as by the farm at Grangehill and further along the track from there to the B923 on the previous day. **Apple (*Malus domestica*)** was in bud on the coastal path (12th) and in flower at Pettycur (18th).

I found numerous plants of **Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*)** in bloom along the coastal path (12th), at Pettycur (18th) and in the village on 20th. Along the coastal path it occurred as a very compact dwarf form on the grassy clifftop, often in association with **Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*)** – see photo *F* on the previous page. At Pettycur it was also associated with that species. Also at Pettycur on 18th, I found **Yellow Figwort (*Scrophularia vernalis*)** at the foot of the cliffs, slightly nearer to Kinghorn than where I had found it two years ago on the Burntisland side of the cliffs. **Thrift (*Armeria maritima*)** was just beginning to come into flower at Pettycur while a large clump of **Bugloss (*Lycopsis arvensis*)** was in full bloom as well as **Honesty (*Lunaria annua*)**; the latter was also found on a stone dyke by the farm track from Grangehill to B923 on 11th.

On 19th I found a yellow 'Brassica-like' plant growing out of a wall beside the main A921 Kirkcaldy road north of Kinghorn. The next day I found the same plant growing against the high wall separating the Kinghorn harbour area from the Kirk by the Sea. I eventually identified it as **Annual Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*)** – both the English and Latin names seem very apt since it obviously likes growing out of or at the base of walls! Another plant of Kinghorn's walls that started flowering in April this year, after a short winter break, was **Yellow Corydalis (*Pseudofumaria lutea*)**, first noticed in flower on 12th.

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