

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – FEBRUARY 2025 by Robert Mill



Two new fungi records for Kinghorn Loch. Left: Velvet Shank (*Flammulina velutipes*), 10 February 2025. **Right:** Blushing Bracket (*Daedaleopsis confragosa*), 13 February 2025. Photos Paul Williams.

In our area, much of February 2025 was chilly, grey and a little damp at times, particularly in the first half when a long-staying Scandinavian high-pressure area was dominating British weather. Eastern Scotland as a whole received 80% of the 1991-2020 long-term average February sunshine but a careful look at the Met Office's map (Met Office, 2025a) reveals that a stretch of the coast from Aberdeen to the East Neuk and the Kirkcaldy area had only 50-70% of the average and Kinghorn was at the edge of this zone. It was yet another month of well-below-average rainfall: the Kinghorn Loch rain gauge registered 30 mm, only 52% of the site's average. Some rain did fall on 18 of February's 28 days – 8.2 mm on 2nd and especially 3rd, 7 mm on 19th when an Atlantic low finally took over from the Scandinavian high, and the rest as dribs and drabs of mostly 1 mm or less per 'rainy' day (SEPA, 2025). I was given a home weather station for my birthday and, once this was set up a few days afterwards, I've been taking daily temperature and pressure readings since 11th February, about the middle of the long dull high-pressure spell. For several days during what I was able to record of that period, daytime temperatures only got to 2-4°C above freezing although they barely dropped overnight, a fact confirmed by the Met Office's official daily maps (Met Office, 2025b). The Atlantic low brought a rapid rise in temperature, reaching 11° and 12°C in our back garden on 20th and 21st. The rest of the month remained milder although closer to average, and because of the breeze there was often a very significant wind-chill effect, so that an actual temperature of 9° actually might have felt like only 1°. This chilliness, even in the milder, often sunnier latter part of the month, coupled with the long, chilly dull spell, meant that many plants were not encouraged to begin flowering, or bees and other invertebrates to emerge.

My four visits to the Loch were spread throughout the month while Paul Williams (PW) made three between 1st and 12th plus a few casual records on 13th but was then away on business for the rest of the month. Paul was responsible for two of February's three new Loch records (NLRs), which were also the first three of 2025. Two were fungi that Paul found in the woods surrounding the Loch while the third was a flowering plant. The total at 28 February thereby increased from 1,775 (31 January) to **1,778**.

AROUND THE LOCH

Birds:

Forty-seven different bird species were recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch during February 2025, four fewer than last month, which can be explained by the fact that compared with January fewer people (only Paul and myself) were recording birds at the Loch. Compared with January, **Mute Swan** numbers were much more stable, at either two or occasionally (on 9th and 12th) three individuals. Two **Wigeon**, a



Duck (left) and drake (right) Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), 9th. Photo Paul Williams.

male and a female, made a one-day visit to the Loch on 9th (PW). The single white domestic **Mallard** remained with those loitering around the jetty all month. Small numbers of **Pochards** (usually two or three) remained until at least 19th, usually all drakes although PW saw one male and one female on 12th. Between 2 and 5 **Tufted Ducks** were also on the Loch until at least 19th, as were up to four **Goldeneye** and the single, long-staying, **Red-breasted Merganser**. On 24th I made the Loch's only record in the month of **Feral Pigeon**. A **Water**

Rail was seen again once, according to the whiteboard in the hide. **Coot** remained all month; I saw 25 off the east shore dam as well as others elsewhere. **Little Grebes** were again present all month, with 10 seen by me at the east dam (and more at the west end) on 19th. A single adult **Great Crested Grebe** was present from 9th (PW); from 12th onwards there were two, one at either end, both presumably waiting for a mate to join them. **Oystercatchers** were noted on three occasions, with a group of over 30 flying over on 9th (PW) being the highest number recorded. The same day PW also noted a party of more than 10 **Curlews** which was also the month's highest number for that wader although they were also seen by PW on 12th and by myself on 19th. A single **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was noted by PW on 13th, probably the same bird that has wintered at the Loch for several years now. **Cormorant** numbers seemed unusually high at the Loch in the first half of February, with 8 on 3rd, 7 on 9th, 15 on 12th, and a peak of **17** on 13th counted by PW (and 11 noted by myself at a different time on 13th); numbers were less on my visit of 19th when I counted one at the east end and three at the west end. One or two **Grey Herons** were also present. Paul made February's only records of **Sparrowhawk** and **Buzzard**, as well as the first of two sightings of **Kestrel**; he was fortunate to see all three species on 13th and also noted Buzzard the previous day. My wife Andrea made February's second **Kestrel** record on 16th when she saw one hovering over the north side of the ecocemetery meadow. Paul also saw the **Kingfisher** again on 9th, but neither **Great Spotted Woodpecker** nor **Jay** was reported. On 24th, while walking past the covered reservoir along the track leading to Kissing Trees Lane, I heard a very brief burst of **Skylark** song, the first time this year I'd heard it. **Long-tailed Tits** were at the hide feeders on 12th (PW) and 19th (myself) while PW noted single **Treecreepers** on both 12th and 13th. Once again, **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** were unrecorded in February, as was either of the two **sparrow** species on the Loch list. **Wagtail** species were also apparently absent. Finally, PW noted about a dozen **Yellowhammers** near the covered reservoir on 12th, the first sighting of these at the Loch since July 2024! The full list of the 47 birds recorded at the Loch during February 2025, in the systematic order of the *British List* (BOU, 2022), is: *Greylag Goose, Farmyard geese hybrids, Mute Swan, Wigeon, Mallard, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Pheasant, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Great Crested Grebe, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kingfisher, Kestrel, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnoek, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer.*

Mammals, amphibians and fish: February's only mammal records were of **Grey Squirrels** at the hide feeders on 3rd and 12th, and fresh **Mole** hills in various places, again more than in previous months.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): The only two invertebrate records at the Loch in February were the same two fly species as recorded last month: a larval leaf-mine of **Holly Leaf-miner (*Phytomyza ilicis*)** on 13th and another swarm of **Winter Gnats (*Trichocera* sp.)** on 19th.

Flowering plants and ferns:

Four ferns (**Common Polypody, Black Spleenwort, Maidenhair Spleenwort** and **Wall-rue**) were recorded at the Loch in February. A total of 57 wild or naturalised flowering plant species was recorded around the Loch during the month (26 in flower for at least part of the month [3 also with fruits], 4 with buds, 8 in fruit only and 18 vegetative with or without leaves). One, a double form of **Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis***



Kinghorn Loch plants, February 2025. **A**, Double Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis* 'Flore Pleno') with 6 outer and 6 inner petals instead of normal 3 and 3 (compare with photo in last month's report). New Loch record, 7th. **B & C**, Italian Alder male catkins (*Alnus cordata*), 7th. **D**, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) male catkins, 7th. **E**, Red Lungwort (*Pulmonaria rubra*), 28th. Photos Robert Mill.

'**Flore Pleno**', found on 7th, had not previously been recorded at the Loch. **Feverfew**, which was in flower for part of January, stopped flowering in February, possibly because of the dull, chilly weather. However, although things were slow, more spring flowers began to bloom in February, most but not all at roughly the same time as last year. **Hazel** (*Corylus avellana*) catkins started shedding pollen from 7th (last year, 6th) and catkins of **Italian Alder** (*Alnus cordata*) were also found that day. Four different types of **crocus** began flowering: **Golden Crocus** (*Crocus chrysanthus*) from 7th (2024, 13th), whereas **Dutch Yellow Crocus** (*C. x luteus*), **Spring Crocus** (*C. neapolitanus*) and **Early Crocus** (*C. tommasinianus*) were all first noticed on 19th, although the last-named had almost certainly started to flower up to a week earlier. **Winter Aconite**, **Common Snowdrop**, **Green Snowdrop** and **Daffodil** flowered throughout February although on my final visit (24th) the aconites looked as though they were close to finishing – a fact confirmed by my visit on March 3rd. No **Lesser Celandines** were noted at the Loch during February, although I had seen a couple of plants in flower above Kinghorn beach as early as 10th January (see my January report) and more were seen elsewhere during February (see the Village, Beach and Coast section of this report). **Lenten Rose** (*Helleborus orientalis*) was flowering from at least 13th, well over a month earlier than 2024 (24 March) although compared with previous years the plant did not look very healthy – possibly drought stress after the winter's below-average rainfall. A **Primrose** plant (*Primula vulgaris*) was noticed in bud on 19th although no flowers were seen. **Red Lungwort** (*Pulmonaria rubra*) just made it into February's plants in bloom, with flowering just beginning on 28th, considerably later than last year's early flowering (7 Feb) and closer to the first-flowering dates of the two previous years (2023, 5 Mar; 2022, 1 Mar). Twenty cultivated plant species were also noted, of which seven were in flower.

Cryptogams:



Kinghorn Loch cryptogams, February 2025. **F & G**, old brackets of Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*) on willow tree, 13th (**G**, single bracket tinged green by alga). **H**, *Cladonia coniocraea* on log, 7th. All photos Robert Mill.

Eight different **fungi** and allies were identified around the Loch during February. Of these, two (both fortunately photographed in the woods around the Loch by Paul Williams) turned out to be new Loch

records: **Velvet Shank** (*Flammulina velutipes*) on 9th and **Blushing Bracket** (*Daedaleopsis confragosa*) on 13th (see photos, page 1). The remaining six had all been previously recorded. One of them (**Turkeytail**, *Trametes versicolor*) was on the basis of old-looking brackets on the willow tree near to the gate to the fishermen's path – these may well have been the same ones as I photographed in March 2024 when they were in peak condition. Curiously I have seen no new brackets of this fungus anywhere over the past winter, whereas it has been common on the stumps of the stumpery between the Pollinator Beds and the Community Garden in all previous winters since I arrived in Kinghorn in March 2021.

Twelve **lichens** (plus some as yet unidentified), four **terrestrial algae** (one of them epimycotic on the surface of the old Turkeytail bracket fungi: see photo G on previous page) and six **mosses** were also found, all of them previously recorded.

VILLAGE, BEACH AND COAST



Kinghorn area wildlife, February 2025. **A**, A very strikingly patterned Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) at Seafield, 13th. Photo Paul Williams. **B**, Common Starfish (*Asterias rubens*), Kinghorn beach, 17th. Photo Andrea Mill. **C**, One of numerous old Robin's Pincushion galls (*Diplolepis rosae*) on rose bushes by the coastal path, 27th. Photo Robert Mill.

As well as my Loch visits, I made three visits to the village on 14th, 17th and 22nd (the latter two including the beach and/or Doo Dell), one to the coastal path as far north as the beach below Linton Court (27th) and one to Mid and North Mire on 28th, plus casual records along the Burnside Path or Red Path Brae on other days en route to or from the Loch. Paul Williams (PW) also recorded along the coastal path between Seafield and Kinghorn on 3rd and 13th, as did Martha Young (eBird) on 5th.

Mammal records on land comprised a **Grey Squirrel** in the village (14th) and lots of fresh **Mole** hills along one edge of the Mire Park (28th). Paul Williams photographed a very strikingly marked **Grey Seal** near Seafield on 13th, while **Harbour Porpoises** were off the Harbour View in Kinghorn on three days and **Common Dolphin** on one day according to the sightings board and an **Otter** was off Pettycur on one day.

A big skein of about 130 **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Lochside Grange estate in Kinghorn on 13th. **Eiders** and **Long-tailed Ducks** remained off the coast. 22 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were seen off the coastal path on 3rd (PW). **Wader** species noted along the coast between Pettycur and Seafield during February were **Oystercatcher**, **Curlew**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, **Purple Sandpiper** and **Redshank** (>110, Seafield, 3rd, PW). The only **auk** record was a single **Common Guillemot** at Seafield on 13th (PW); Paul also saw a single **Red-throated Diver** nearer to Kinghorn on the same date. Up to 10 **Fulmars** were on the Kinghorn cliffs on 11th, 17th and 22nd while singles were seen off the coast path by PW on 13th. **Grey Herons** were seen off the Kinghorn coastal path by PW on 13th and by myself on 27th (two). No **raptors** were noted during February, nor (once again) any **winter thrushes** (**Redwing** and **Fieldfare**). **Grey** and **Pied Wagtails** (both apparently absent from the Loch during the month) were both seen at Seafield on 3rd (PW) while Martha Young noted Pied Wagtail (only) on the following day along the Seafield—Kinghorn coastal path.



Kinghorn area plants, February 2025. **A**, Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) flower buds emerging from soil, North Mire, 28th. **B**, Field Pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*), Mid Mire, 28th. **C**, Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), Burnside Path, 14th. **D**, Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), coastal path, 27th. Photos Robert Mill.

On 27th, I heard the buzz of a **bumblebee** by a patch of ivy close to the start of the coastal path by Kinghorn caravan park just past the railway bridge. Although I could not see it to confirm, I am practically certain it would have been a queen **Buff-tailed Bumblebee** – my first record of any bee this year. On the same walk I also saw numerous old **Robin’s Pincushion galls** caused (last summer) by the gall-wasp *Diplolepis rosae*; I also saw one or two at Mid Mire the following day. **Shore life** noted during the month included a large **Common Starfish (*Asterias rubens*)** washed up on a rock on the beach below the ‘Fulmar cliff’ at Kinghorn on 17th as well as the usual variety of limpets and barnacles.

As in January, few **flowering plants** were noted during February. Of 38 species noted flowering during all my walks at the Loch and elsewhere, only 12 were found exclusively at localities in around Kinghorn village or along the coastal path, not at the Loch; the other 26 were equally divided between the Loch only, and the Loch plus other sites. **Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)** was flowering in much greater abundance at Doo Dell (22nd) than in January and was also in flower along the coastal path (27th) and Mid Mire (28th). Along the coastal path on 27th, I counted a minimum of 47 flowering stems of **Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*)**. **Common Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*)** was just beginning to flower along the coastal path on 27th, as was **Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*)** at Mid Mire the following day as well as much **Field Pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*)**. **Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*)** continued flowering although few inflorescences were noted compared with previous years. Buds of its close relative **Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)** were only just beginning to emerge from below ground at the big patch on North Mire (28th). Another ally of these, **Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)** was in flower along the Burnside Path from 14th but was not noted anywhere else. **Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)** was just starting to flower at the Kinghorn end of the coastal path on 27th, as was **Alexanders (*Smyrniolus olusatrum*)**.



Kinghorn area cryptogams, February 2025. **E**, a powdery mildew, most likely *Golovinomyces cichoracearum*, on leaf of Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*) and possibly a new host/fungus association; 27th, coastal path. **F**, Silky Wall Feather-moss (*Homalothecium sericeum*), dyke by coastal path, 27th. **G**, Seaside Grimmia (*Schistidium maritimum*) on lichen-covered boulder on beach by coastal path N of Kinghorn, 27th. Photos Robert Mill.

Among the three **fungi** I noted, the occurrence of the powdery mildew *Golovinomyces cichoracearum* on Winter Heliotrope leaves (photo E above) may well be a new host-plant association for this mildew since it is not listed in a very recent check-list of the British powdery mildews (Woods et al., 2024). I found six

mosses and two liverworts around Kinghorn during February; coastal path records of **Silky Wall Feather-moss (*Homalothecium sericeum*)** on a dyke near Linton Court and **Seaside Grimmia (*Schistidium maritimum*)** on a boulder by the shingle beach north of Kinghorn both confirmed earlier records in NBN Atlas (2025a, 2025b) from grid square NT2787 made by David Chamberlain and others in 2011 (see photos F and G on previous page).

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