

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – JANUARY 2025 *by Robert Mill*



Map Lichen (*Rhizocarpon geographicum*), 8 January 2025. Photo Robert Mill.

January 2025 will probably be most remembered for Storm Éowyn (23rd/24th), which swept across central Scotland bringing the most damaging winds for more than ten years, causing a Met Office red warning to be issued. Kinghorn Loch got off very lightly with only a small number of trees blown down – far more damage was caused in Kirkcaldy.

However, most of the month was much calmer, with long settled spells. In fact, it was Scotland's 4th-sunniest January on record in a 116-year series, although temperatures were below the long-term average (Met Office, 2025a, b), mainly due to a very cold period from 1st-11th (Met Office, 2025b). On 12th, things abruptly changed and it was exceptionally mild from 12th-18th, particularly 13th-15th; from 19th till the month's end temperatures were close to average (Met Office, 2025b). The long run of months with below-average rainfall continued. The SEPA-managed Loch rain gauge only collected 32.4 mm, 55% of the site's long-term January average. A deep low that brought heavy snow and prolonged rain (with flooding) in England on 5th was responsible for 5.4 mm at Kinghorn that day. There were 18 completely dry days and another six when less than 1 mm of rain fell – all but three of those 24 days were after the 5th, 17 of them between 6th and 22nd (SEPA, 2025). Storm Éowyn only brought 7.2 mm between 23rd and 25th. Hard on its heels, there was a heavier spell of rain on 26th/27th when 9.2 mm fell (SEPA, 2025) – this was presumably due to another storm, Storm Herminia, that brought very heavy rain to southern England on those dates (Met Office, 2025b).

I made six visits to the Loch throughout the month while Paul Williams (PW), who was away for most of January, made one visit at the start and three at the end. No confirmed new Loch records (NLRs) were made during the month, so the total at 31 January remained unchanged from the end of 2024, at **1,775**. However, there were two unconfirmed bird records (see below) that, if they could be substantiated, would both be NLRs.

AROUND THE LOCH

Birds: Fifty-one bird species were recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch during January 2025, much the same number as December 2024. As well as Paul Williams and myself, those who recorded birds at the Loch in January were Pauline Bell (Kinghorn District Wildlife Group Facebook page), three eBird listers (Hawk Gula, Chris Hill and Mark Wood) and my wife Andrea. In addition to the 51 accepted records,



Top: Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*), 28th. **Bottom:** Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), 30th. Photos Paul Williams.

mention needs to be made of a single **Bar-tailed Godwit** and no fewer than four **Turnstones** that were recorded on 10th by Hawk Gula (eBird), both of which would be new Loch records if they could be substantiated. The Loch itself contains little or no suitable habitat for either species, particularly Turnstone which (unlike the godwit, which has been recorded occasionally at a few inland Lochs in Fife) has only been recorded along the Fife coastline. Hence neither is accepted here as a Loch record, although the possibility that they were noted flying over cannot be ruled out.

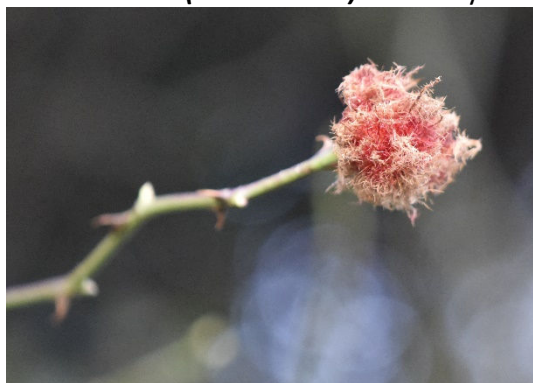
Mute Swan numbers fluctuated considerably at the Loch during January. The highest number seen was eight on 8th, when I counted one fully adult swan, two almost adult ones (white-plumaged but with the beaks dull-coloured instead of bright deep red) and five large cygnets still in their brown-and-white juvenile plumage. Possibly the same party was also seen on 11th by Mark Wood of eBird who also counted 8 but didn't specify the make-up. Paul Williams (PW) counted 6 adults on 27th, the highest number of adult swans at any one time, but mentioned no cygnets on that date. By the month's end, things seemed to have settled down to two pairs of adults, one each at the east and west ends, with all younger birds having apparently departed. Small numbers of **Pochard** were present throughout the month: December's female was seen by PW on 3rd, while Chris Hill (eBird: CH)

saw four drakes and a female on 11th, which seems to be the last day on which a female was noted. Between one and three drakes were seen till the end of the month. **Tufted Ducks** were present all month: numbers were mostly between three and 12 but no fewer than 69 were present at the end of the very cold spell on 11th (CH) and there were 20 on 14th (MW). **Goldeneye** were recorded from 11th onwards, the peak number being 9 on 27th (PW). A single **Goosander** was also seen on 27th (PW) while a **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen on four different dates by three different observers including PW on 28th and 31st. A **Water Rail** was seen again once (31st, PW). **Little Grebes** were again present all month, with 18 seen by me at the west end (and three off the east shore) on 8th and 22 off the east shore on 26th (Andrea Mill) being the highest counts. A single adult **Great Crested Grebe** was present from 8th onwards, at least initially in winter plumage but by the end of the month it had begun to develop breeding plumage. Parties of up to a dozen **Oystercatchers** flew over on nine occasions during the month but a flyover of just two **Curlews** on 31st (PW) was the month's only record of that wader. As well as the usual gull species, a **Mediterranean Gull** was recorded at the Loch on 14th by Mark Wood (eBird) – the first sighting of this species at the Loch since January 2021. **Cormorants** and **Grey Herons** were seen throughout January; the peak counts for both (seven Cormorants, four Herons) were both on 18th (CH). After a three-month apparent absence, on my visit to the hide on 2nd I was treated to the sight of a **Sparrowhawk** chasing a **Blackbird** across the channel and in front of me into the shrubs to the left of the hide – quite an exciting start to my birding year! Single **Buzzards** were seen on 11th and 18th, both by CH (eBird), while the **Kingfisher** was seen on three dates and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** once (11th, CH). I noted more than 30 **Rooks** on 8th and the species was also seen on 10th by Hawk Gula (eBird). Paul Williams spotted two **Treecreepers** on 3rd and one on 31st. **Song Thrush** (2nd, myself; 3rd, PW) and **Mistle Thrush** (12th, Pauline Bell) were both noted but, after their poor showings in December, **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** were unrecorded in January. **Tree Sparrows** were noted by PW on 3rd, 27th and 31st while unusually there were also three sightings of **House Sparrows**, by myself on 8th (two near the Red Path Brae end of the Craigencait access track), Hawk Gula (five on 10th) and Mark Wood (14th). Lastly, PW

noted four **Greenfinches** on 27th, the first sighting since November. The full list of the 51 birds definitely recorded at the Loch during January 2025, in the systematic order of the *British List* (BOU, 2022), is: *Greylag Goose, Farmyard geese hybrids, Mute Swan, Mallard, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser, Pheasant, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Great Crested Grebe, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Tree Sparrow, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch.*

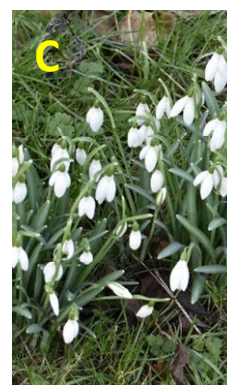
Mammals, amphibians and fish: **Brown Hares** were recorded twice by PW (one on 27th, three on 31st), **Grey Squirrels** visited the hide feeders on several dates, and fresh **Mole** hills were seen in various places, more than in previous months.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): The only three invertebrate records at the Loch in January were: a



persistent **Robin's Pincushion** gall caused by the gall-wasp *Diplolepis rosae* on a Dog Rose branch tip (8th; see photo at left); a larval leaf-mine of the **Holly Leaf-miner (Phytomyza ilicis)** on 15th; and a swarm of **Winter Gnats (Trichocera sp.)**, also on 15th, which was in the middle of the very mild spell. Winter gnats belong to the family Trichoceridae whose nearest relatives are the crane-flies (families Tipulidae, Limoniidae) and indeed they are sometimes called winter crane-flies. Five species of *Trichocera* occur in Fife, the commonest according to the NBN Atlas being *Trichocera regelationis*. However, it was not possible to get a photograph showing any of the identification features.

Flowering plants and ferns:

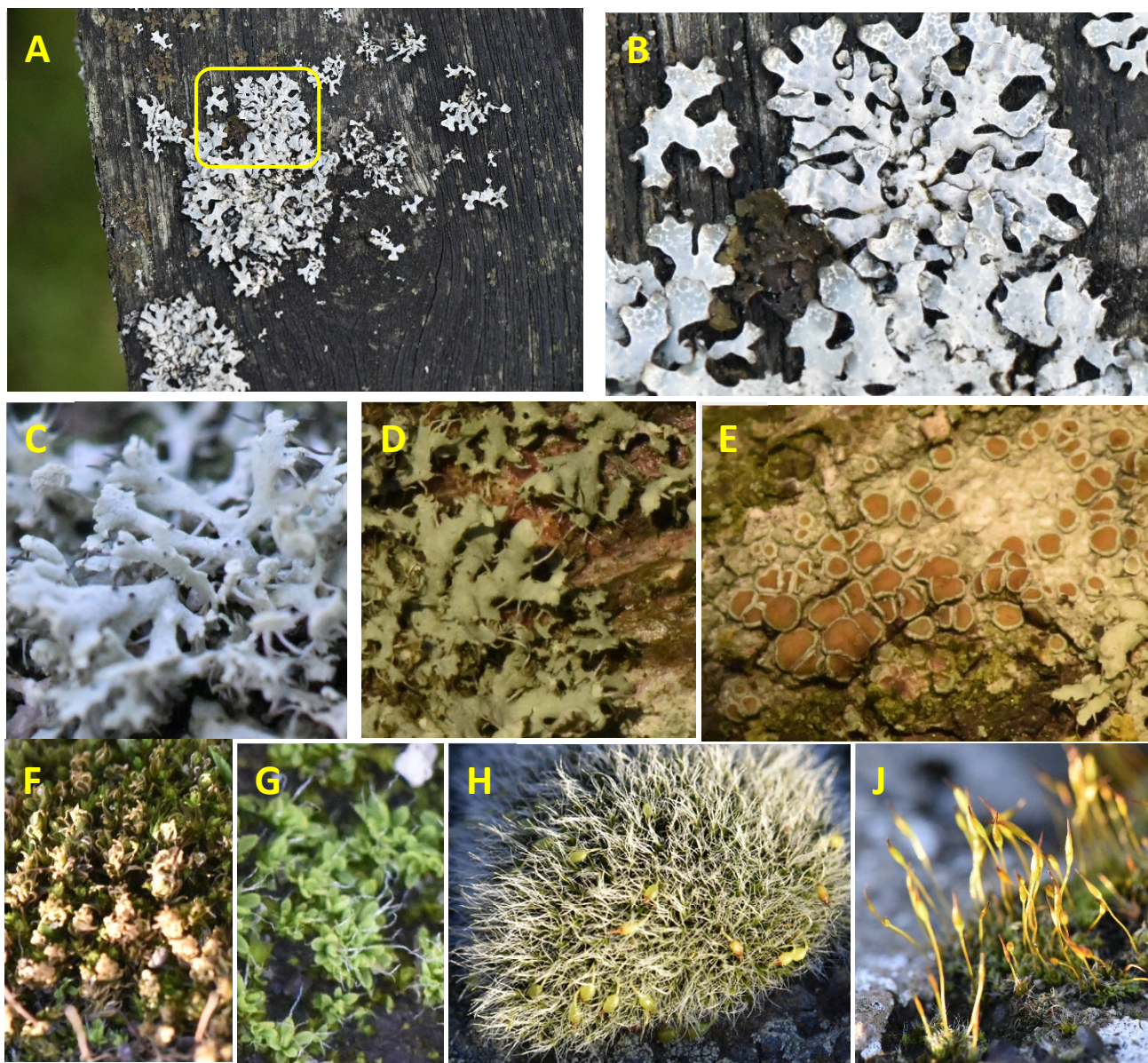


Kinghorn Loch plants, January 2025. A, Some of the Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) on the old water mill, 2nd. **B,** Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*), 29th. **C,** Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*), 29th. Photos Robert Mill.

Two ferns (**Common Polypody** and **Wall-rue**) were recorded at the Loch in January. I noticed for the first time that the upper part of the south wall of the former water mill, as well as parts of its roof and guttering, have been extensively colonised by Common Polypody. 38 wild or naturalised flowering plant species (16 in flower for at least part of the month, 2 with buds, 12 in fruit and 8 vegetative with or without leaves), were recorded around the Loch during January. Some of those in flower at the start of the month, such as **Red Campion** and **Common Rampion**, succumbed to the very cold weather that began shortly afterwards but others such as **Common Chickweed, Daisy, Groundsel, White Dead-nettle, Red Dead-nettle** and **Gorse** continued flowering. The month also saw the first spring flowers: **Green Snowdrop** and **Winter Aconite** were in flower on 15th, while **Common Snowdrop** and **Daffodil**

were in bud on that date but flowering on 29th. **Golden Crocus** was noted in bud on 29th and would not begin flowering until February. Ten cultivated plant species were also noted, of which six were in flower.

Cryptogams



Kinghorn Loch cryptogams, 29 January 2025. Lichens: **A & B**, Hammer Shield Lichen (*Parmelia sulcata*) on wooden bench (**B**, area of yellow rectangle in **A** enlarged). **C**, *Physcia adscendens* on fence. **D**, *Physcia tenella*, birch. **E**, *Lecanora chlarotera* agg., birch. **Mosses, jetty walls:** **F & G**, *Syntrichia ruralis* (**F**, older dry stems, twisted brownish leaves; **G**, younger stems, untwisted green leaves, long hair-tips). **H**, *Grimmia pulvinata*. **J**, *Tortula muralis*. All photos Robert Mill.

As in December, only two different **fungi** and allies were identified around the Loch during January: **Warlock's Butter** (*Exidia nigricans*) and, once again, **Conifer Mazegill** (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*). Eight **lichens** (plus some others to be identified), two **terrestrial algae** and six **mosses** were also found, all of them previously recorded. The most interesting **moss** was **Great Hairy Screw-moss** (*Syntrichia ruralis*). I last recorded this in the south-east corner of the Loch (in monad NT2687) in November 2023. However, January 2025's record (made on 28th) was on the jetty car park wall, just within the eastern boundary of the other Ordnance Survey loch monad (NT2587), confirming an earlier record from the same monad (not necessarily where I found it) made on 1 April 2011 (NBN Atlas, 2025). Lichens of note on 29th included **Hammer Shield Lichen** (*Parmelia sulcata*) on a picnic bench rather than on the bark of a living tree, *Physcia adscendens* on a fence and *Lecanora chlarotera* and *Physcia tenella* on a birch trunk.

VILLAGE, BEACH AND COAST

As well as my Loch visits, I went down to the village, harbour and beach on 10th and walked the whole length of the coast path from Seafield back to Kinghorn on 30th. January was unusual in that most of the bird sightings along the coast were by eBird listers rather than myself or Paul Williams (PW), who was offshore much of the month. The eBird listers included Christopher Rodger (CR: Pettycur, 2nd and 3rd); Jon Penman (JP: Seafield—Kinghorn coast path, 2nd); Chris Hill (CH: Pettycur, 11th); Mark Wood (MW: Seafield—Kinghorn coast path, 15th); William Brown (WB: Seafield—Kinghorn, 19th); and Mairi Connor (MC: Seafield-Kinghorn, 31st). Paul Williams only managed one Seafield—Kinghorn walk, on 28th two days before my own.

A **sea Otter** was seen off the Harbour View on one January day and **Harbour Porpoises** on three, according to the sightings board. No **land mammals** were recorded except at the Loch.

Sixty-two **Pink-footed Geese** flew W over Pettycur Bay on 3rd (CR). Twelve **Wigeon** were off the coast path on 2nd (JP) while CR noted small numbers of **Mallard** inshore at Pettycur on both 2nd (four) and 3rd (two). As well as the more usual sea ducks, both **Velvet Scoter** and **Common Scoter** were seen off the coast path by Jon Penman on 2nd while the latter scoter was also noted at Pettycur (CH, 11th). **Eiders** and **Long-tailed Ducks** were off the coast throughout January, the highest count being 24 at Pettycur on 11th (CH). Thirty **Goldeneye** were off the coast path on 15th (MW) and one was at Pettycur on 2nd (CR). **Red-breasted Mergansers** were seen at Pettycur, off the coast path and at Seafield on five dates by different observers. I noted at least 60 **Rock Doves** on one of the detached stacks (remnants of a former breakwater) next to the Kinghorn end of the high sea wall at Seafield (30th). Five **Great Crested Grebes** were in Pettycur Bay on 2nd (CR) and one off the coast path on 15th (MW). **Wader** species noted along the coast between Pettycur and Seafield during January were **Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Turnstone, Knot, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper** (38 on 15th, MW; also at Seafield, 27th and 30th, PW) and **Redshank**; as in December, **Dunlin** was not seen by anyone. Christopher Rodger noted some very high counts of birds feeding at low tide at Pettycur Bay on 2nd and 3rd: 470 Oystercatchers on 2nd (and a few more, 479, on 3rd!); 163 Bar-tailed Godwits on 2nd, 141 on 3rd; 271 Knot on 2nd (and 250 later in the month on 11th, counted by Chris Hill); and 22 Sanderling on 2nd (highest count, however, 33 on 11th by Chris Hill). As well as these, a **Common Snipe** was seen by the Seafield sea wall on 2nd by Jon Penman. **Common Guillemot** was recorded once (off coast path, 2nd, JP) and **Razorbill** three times (Pettycur, 2nd, CR; coast on 2nd, JP and on 19th, WB). Small numbers of **Puffins** continued to be recorded. Single **Red-throated Divers** were off Pettycur Bay on 2nd (CR), the coast path (2nd and 15th) and Seafield (30h, PW). My wife saw about 14 **Fulmars** on the Kinghorn cliffs on 7th but these were covered with icicles, and completely deserted, when I went there on 10th which was a very cold day. Single Fulmars were also noted at Pettycur (2nd, CR) and Seafield (30th, PW). There were three reports, spanning the whole month, of **Grey Herons** along the coast. A **Buzzard** was at Pettycur on 2nd (CR) and a **Peregrine** somewhere along the coast path on 19th (WB). **Long-tailed Tits** were at Seafield on 20th (PW). As at the Loch, there were no records of **winter thrushes (Redwing and Fieldfare)** elsewhere in the Kinghorn area during January. **Pied Wagtails** (apparently absent from the Loch in January) were spotted on several dates along the coast; 10 were seen by MW on 15th.



Springtails (probably Moss Springtail, *Neanura muscorum*) among moss (*Syntrichia ruralis*) on a wall in Kinghorn village, 30th. Photo Robert Mill.

On 29th, I saw **Winter Gnats (*Trichocera* sp.)** again, this time above a muddy puddle on the Burnside Path. I thought these were my only non-Loch **terrestrial invertebrate** records made around Kinghorn in January. However, on 30th, at the end of my coast walk when I was just round the corner from my home, I took a photo of moss on a wall. When examining this photo later, I discovered that as well as the moss I had photographed an aggregation of small purplish-blue 'grubs'. These turned out to be springtails (see photo, left). Identification has been tricky but the most likely candidate is a very common species, **Moss Springtail (*Neanura muscorum*)**.



Kinghorn area plants, January 2025. **A & B**, Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), Kinghorn harbour area: **A**, 10 January 2025; **B**, same plant on 27 April 2024. Photos to same scale; note growth over last season. **C**, Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*), coast path, 30th. **D**, Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*), coast path, 30th. **E**, Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*), flowering very early, Doo Dell, 10th. Photos Robert Mill.

Very few flowering plants were noted during January. Only 11 species were found in flower, most of them along the coastal path on 30th. On my earlier walk, on 10th, I was surprised to find **Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)** flowers at the foot of the steps beside the 'Fulmar cliff'. At the Loch, by contrast, not even the leaves were apparent during the month. The **Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*)** on the harbour wall has again grown considerably over the past season (compare photos **A** and **B** above, taken on 10/01/25 and 27/04/24 respectively). The plant is much bushier than last year and its left extremity has practically reached the hole in the wall while its bottom right is now next to the reddish stone near the bottom right corner of photo **B**. Along the coastal path on 30th, I found at least 40 flowering stems of **Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*)** at the site I have been aware of since 2023, and **Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites pyrenaicus*)** was beginning to come into flower nearer to Seafield Tower. **Hart's-tongue Fern** was noted along the coast path north of Linton Court towards Seafield Tower on 30th. The lichen ***Evernia prunastri*** festooned the twigs of blackthorn bushes nearby. The moss I photographed on the wall close to my home on 30th, which was harbouring the aggregation of springtails, happened to be ***Syntrichia ruralis*** which as noted above I had found at the Loch a couple of days before.

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