

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – DECEMBER 2024 by Robert Mill



Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), 26 December 2024. New Loch record. Photo Paul Williams.

For the UK as a whole, December 2024 was provisionally the fourth-warmest on record in a series going back to 1884 (Met Office, 2025a). However, there were ups and downs: in our area, 19 of the month's 31 days (1st, 4th, 5th, 14th-18th, 20th & 21st, and 23rd-31st) were warmer than average with 1st, 15th, 17th and 24th exceptionally so, whereas the other twelve were cooler than average, 10th and 11th being particularly cold (Met Office, 2025b). However, warmth did not mean sunshine: sunshine was well below the average for December, which UK-wide was the fourth-dullest and in Scotland the 5th-dullest in a 115-year-long series (Met Office, 2025a). The month was windier than average, in Scotland ranking 14th in a 56-year-long series (Met Office, 2025b). There was one named storm (Darragh on 6th-7th) that had big impacts nation-wide, particularly in Wales. In our area, however, another stormy period on 30th and 31st, that for some reason was not given a storm name, brought even stronger winds than Darragh and led to the cancellation of Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations. December was yet another month of below-average rainfall in the Kinghorn area, although not nearly as extreme as November. The SEPA rain gauge at the Loch collected 61.2 mm of precipitation in the month, about 79% of the December average of 77.7 mm (SEPA, 2025). Most of this fell in two large bursts, 19.8 mm during Storm Darragh on 6th/7th (16.4 mm on 6th, 3.4 mm on 7th) and 25.4 mm (exactly 1 inch) during the unnamed Hogmanay storm (16.8 mm on 30th, 8.6 mm on 31st). Between those two wet and windy spells, there was a long, much quieter and drier spell of 22 days from 8th-29th during which only 9.6 mm of rain fell and in which all but one of the month's 16 totally dry days occurred.

Due to a combination of the often-inclement weather and a bad cold that started on Christmas Day and lasted until after New Year, I only visited the Loch twice, on 10th and 18th. Paul Williams made six visits, all on or after 18th due to his work commitments in the first half; for bird records at least, these nicely complemented my own lack of recording during that period, as did a visit by Pauline Bell on 27th. The year's last two new Loch records, a bird and a fungus, brought 2024's final total up from 1,773 (30 November) to **1,775** on 31 December, an increase of 107 from 1,668 on 1 January. Of these, five (two birds and three plants) were historic records (2010 or earlier) traced through NBN Atlas or other sources, while the others were made during 2024 by myself or other recorders such as Paul Williams or Andy Pay, to whom (especially Paul) I express my gratitude for their help over the past year. The 107 additional records of 2024 comprised 4 birds (two historic), one butterfly (Holly Blue), 4 moths, 4 hoverflies, 17 other flies, 8 beetles, 3 bugs, 5 bees, wasps, ants and sawflies, 3 other insects, 4 spiders and allies, 1 other animal, 23 fungi and 30 flowering plants (3 historic).

AROUND THE LOCH



Top: Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*), 21st. **Bottom:** Female Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), 24th. Photos Paul Williams.

Birds: A total of 52 different bird species was recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch during December, a very reasonable total given that most recording was done in the second half.

December's 'star bird' was a **Little Egret**, which was first seen by Andy Pay on 5th and then paid a second visit on Boxing Day when it was seen and photographed on one of the fishing stances along the northwest bank by both PW and Mark Nesbitt (photos on Kinghorn District Wildlife Group Facebook page; one of Paul's photos is on page 1 of this report). These were, of course, the first and second Loch records of Little Egret. It was also seen on numerous occasions around Burntisland. The only sighting of **Pink-footed Geese** was on 19th by Paul Williams (PW). The lone female **Mute Swan** was the only one seen at the Loch until Christmas Eve, when PW saw six swans on the Loch: two adults, one immature and three cygnets. On Boxing Day, he again saw only the resident female on the Loch itself, plus another four swans flying over. A female **Pochard** was present for a few days between 19th and 23rd, favouring one of the rafts near the west end. Four or five **Tufted Ducks** were present throughout December and between 1 and 4 **Goldeneye** were on the Loch in the second half at least, as well as a single **Goosander** 'redhead' (female or juvenile) on 19th and 23rd (PW). A **Water Rail** was seen once (26th, PW). **Little Grebes** were present all month, with 11 seen

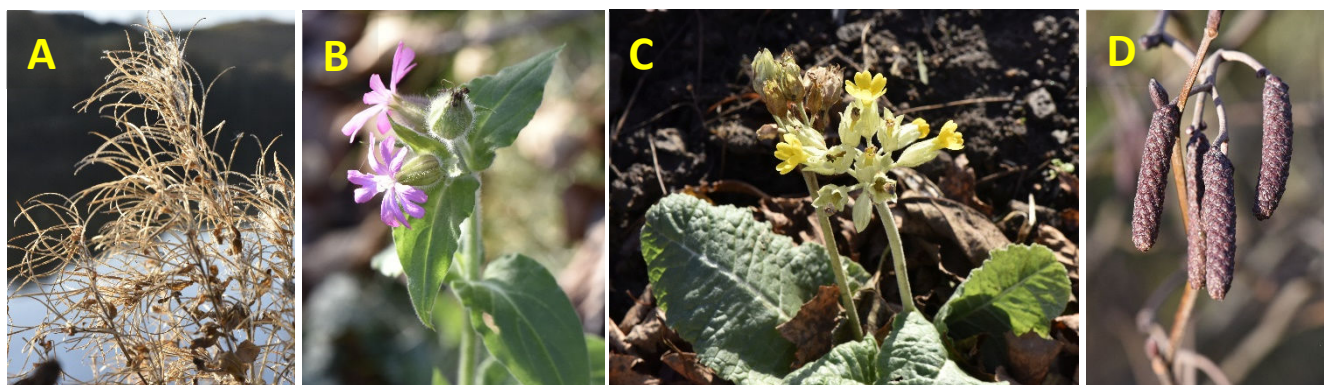
by me on 10th, but **Great Crested Grebes** were absent. Four **Oystercatchers** flew over on 26th, as well as singles on 19th and 23rd (PW). Twenty or more **Curlews** were seen on both 21st and 26th by PW. Up to three **Cormorants** were seen on several occasions, as well as up to three **Grey Herons**. **Sparrowhawk** went unrecorded for a third month but I saw three **Buzzards** circling together above the Pond area on 10th (as well a single one over the Loch's east side that day) and PW saw single birds on 23rd and 26th. **Kestrels** were seen or heard on 4th over the ecocemetery by my wife Andrea, as well as by PW on 18th and by Pauline Bell on 27th. Once again, PW saw a single **Kingfisher** twice (19th & 23rd) and he saw a **Jay** again on 21st. **Skylark** was noted by him on 26th and **Goldcrest** on 24th. **Winter thrushes** finally made an appearance, with a single **Redwing** noted by PW on 21st and a **Fieldfare** photographed by Pauline Bell on 27th. Unusually, neither **Pied** nor **Grey Wagtail** was noted at the Loch by anyone during December.

Finally, mention should be made of a report of a **Brambling** by the Craigenalt access road on 10 November in Fife Bird Club's monthly summary for last month (Fife Bird Club 2024, not published till 20 December, after my own November report). The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during December 2024, in the systematic order of the *British List* (BOU, 2022), is: *Greylag Goose, Farmyard geese hybrids, Pink-footed Goose, Mute Swan, Mallard, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Goosander, Pheasant, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Oystercatcher, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Buzzard, Kingfisher, Kestrel, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest, Wren, Treecreeper, Starling, Song Thrush, Redwing, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Robin, Tree Sparrow, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Goldfinch.*

Mammals, amphibians and fish: As in November, the only mammal records at the Loch in December were of **Grey Squirrels** visiting the hide feeders, and fresh **Mole** hills in various places. On 19th, PW noted that one of the Cormorants he saw that day still had a **Perch** in its beak.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): No invertebrates were noted by anyone around the Loch during December.

Flowering plants and ferns:



Plants past, present and future, Kinghorn Loch, December 2024. **A**, Fruits of Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) by the Loch shore. **B**, wild Red Campion (*Silene dioica*). **C**, cultivated Cowslip (*Primula veris* cv.). **D**, Developing male catkins of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) that will shed pollen in spring 2025. All photos by Robert Mill on 10 December 2024.

Two ferns, and 43 wild or naturalised flowering plant species (17 in flower for at least part of the month, 3 with buds, 11 in fruit and 12 vegetative), were recorded around the Loch during December. Most of those still in flower were common horticultural ‘weeds’ such as **Shepherd’s Purse**, **Field Pennycress**, **Common Chickweed**, **Daisy**, **Dandelion**, **Groundsel**, **Red Dead-nettle** and others. The few remaining ones were common perennials like **Common Knapweed** and **Red Campion**, as well as **Gorse**. Fifteen cultivated plant species were also noted, of which just eight were in flower. The most unexpected of these was a cultivated form of **Cowslip**, a native species that, in the wild at the Loch, flowers between March and May (mainly in April).

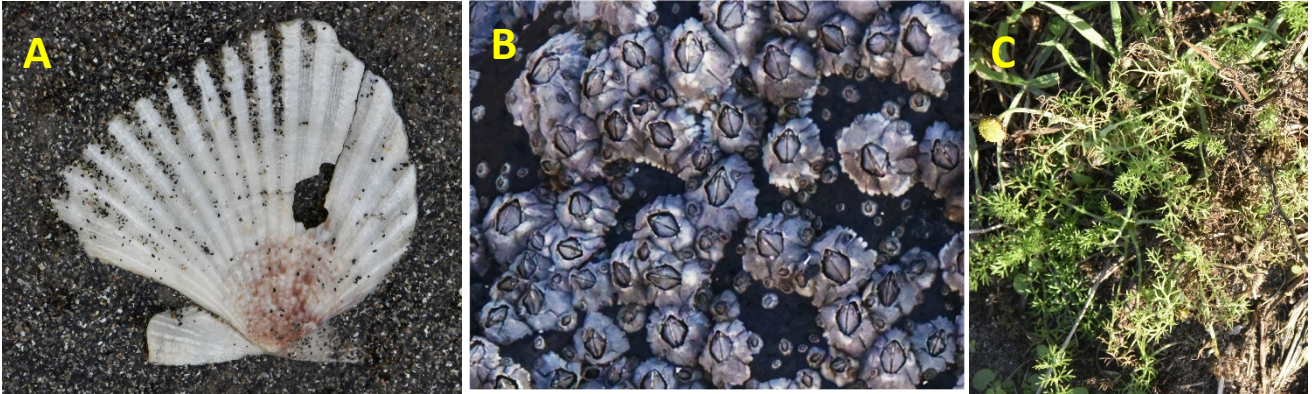
Cryptogams



Fungal records, Kinghorn Loch, December 2024. **A**, *Mycosphaerella recutita* on Reed Sweet-grass, 10th, new Loch record. **B**, Conifer Mazegill (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*), 10th. Photos Robert Mill.

Just two different **fungi** and allies were identified around the Loch during December. One was the often-seen small brown bracket fungus, **Conifer Mazegill** (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*). The other was forming black streaks on dead leaves of Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) at the marsh, where I found it on 10th; I have tentatively identified this as *Mycosphaerella recutita*, December’s only new Loch record other than the Little Egret. Four lichens (plus some others that are as yet unidentified), four mosses and two terrestrial algae were also found, the most notable being **Common Pocket-moss** (*Fissidens taxifolius*) near the marsh on 10th.

VILLAGE, BEACH AND COAST



Kinghorn area seashore life, December 2024. **A**, Queen Scallop (*Aequipecten orbicularis*), Kinghorn beach, 2nd. **B**, Acorn Barnacles (*Semibalanus balanoides*), Pettycur, 19th. **C**, Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*), Pettycur, 19th, leaves and old flower-head minus its ray florets. Photos Robert Mill.

During December, as well as my Loch visits, I did a village walk on 12th and visited the beaches at Kinghorn on 2nd and Pettycur on 19th. Bird sightings around Kinghorn were almost entirely by Paul Williams (PW) or myself, except for a list from Pettycur on 3rd by Jonathan Lethbridge (eBird: JL).

My wife Andrea saw a couple of **Roe Deer** by the Mid Mire path on 5th. According to the board near the Harbour View, December's **cetacean** sightings were of **Common (Harbour) Porpoise** and **Minke Whale**, both seen on 26th.

Eiders and **Long-tailed Ducks** were seen off the coast throughout the month. **Wader** species noted along the coast between Pettycur and Seafield during December were **Oystercatcher**, **Ringed Plover**, **Curlew**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, **Purple Sandpiper** and **Redshank**, although no high counts were reported. **Common Guillemot** (two at Pettycur on 3rd, JL), **Razorbill** (one between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower, 28th, PW) and unseasonal juvenile **Puffins** between Seafield and Kinghorn on 20th, 22nd and 28th (PW) were all noted, but no more **Little Auks**. A single **Red-throated Diver** at Pettycur on 3rd (JL) was the only record of that species in December. **Fulmars** returned to the Kinghorn cliffs on 13th (Ronnie Mackie) and PW saw a juvenile **Gannet** off the coast between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower on 28th, and a **Kestrel** along the same stretch of coast on 22nd. **Long-tailed Tits** were at Seafield on 20th (PW). In contrast to the Loch, there were no records of **winter thrushes (Redwing and Fieldfare)** elsewhere in the Kinghorn area during December. Paul Williams saw two **Reed Buntings** on the coastal path between Kinghorn and Seafield Tower on 28th.

As at the Loch, I recorded no **terrestrial invertebrates** around Kinghorn in December. However, on one of my beach walks, as well as the usual commonly recorded shells such as **Common Limpet**, **Common Cockle** and **Pod Razor Clam**, I noted a **Queen Scallop (*Aequipecten orbicularis*)** on Kinghorn beach on 2nd. Very few flowering plants were noted in the village. Only nine species were found in flower, the more noteworthy being **Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*)** and **Sun Spurge (*Euphorbia helioscopia*)** in the village on 12th and **Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*)** at Pettycur on 19th.

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