

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT - OCTOBER 2022 by Robert Mill



Small Copper butterfly (*Lycaena phlaeas*) on Fennel flowers, 10 October 2022. **Left:** Wings fully closed. **Right:** Wings slightly open. New Loch record. Photos Robert Mill. See page 2 for more information.

The run of warmer than average months continued unbroken in October thanks to the jet stream bringing very warm subtropical air northwards, especially in the last week to ten days. Fife as a whole was 0.5-2.5°C warmer than the long-term average, with the Kinghorn/Kirkcaldy area being in the upper part of that range. Fife received average rainfall, unlike Caithness and the Moray Firth which were considerably drier than average, and western Scotland and especially Northern Ireland which had above-average rainfall. Our area of Fife also had average amounts of sunshine whereas the Dunfermline area, parts of Caithness and the Moray coast, and almost all of England, had above average to well above average sunshine totals for October (Met Office, 2022).

Craigencalt's head bailiff, with whom I had a very useful chat on one of my visits to the Loch in October, mentioned that an **American Mink (*Neovison vison*)** had been seen eating frogs at the Loch some time ago – a somewhat worrying omission from my Loch list, especially if it is still around. New additions to the list in October itself comprised 1 bird, 1 butterfly, 1 moth, 1 beetle, 3 fungi and one flowering plant. These plus the Mink record meant that the Loch list grew by another nine species, from 1,454 on 30 September to **1,463** on 31 October. As usual, 'new Loch record' is abbreviated NLR, especially in photo captions.

AROUND THE LOCH

Birds: October was a really good month for birds at the Loch, with no less than 61 species recorded by several observers, notably Paul Williams who, like last month, was responsible for finding quite a few of them. These included one new record for the Loch list, **Stonechat**, which he saw by the horses' field on 10th as well as just outside the Loch recording area on other dates. Migration was in full swing with most summer visitors departed (neither **Swallow** nor **Sand Martin** were recorded at the Loch by anyone during October) and winter ones arriving. The latter included **Mistle Thrush** from 10th and **Redwing** from 14th; both were reported as 'numerous' by Paul Williams on 25th. Skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over on several dates. By contrast, **Chiffchaffs** were still present on both 11th and 13th, with not just one but two **singing** on the latter date, and Paul Williams saw a male **Blackcap** on 10th. **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes** were present all month, with at least ten of the latter seen by Paul Williams on 21st. A **Kingfisher** was seen on four occasions between 10th and 25th at least. As well as the usual **Black-headed**, **Common** and **Herring Gulls**, **Great Black-backed Gulls** were seen on four dates (with three present on 12th) and **Lesser Black-backed** on 12th, in all cases by Paul Williams. **Birds of prey** included **Buzzard** (11th), **Kestrel** (11th and 17th) and **Sparrowhawk** (10th) – all

recorded by Paul Williams – while I heard a **Tawny Owl** hooting in sunny weather just before lunchtime on 13th. **Tufted Ducks** (three on 21st, two on 26th: Paul Williams), **Goldeneye** (three seen by Pauline Bell on 12th and the same number on 21st by Paul Williams) and **Wigeon** (11th, Paul) were all recorded, and **Cormorants** began to return after being absent for most of the summer months (17th, Paul Williams). **Curlews** were recorded on three dates, with the largest number being on 21st, when Paul saw 15 in the horse pasture and another five flying over the Loch. Apart from the **Stonechat**, some of the more notable smaller birds observed in October included both **Grey Wagtail** (several occasions) and **Pied Wagtail** (25th), **Siskin** (21st, Paul Williams), **Skylark** (4 dates, Paul), **Starling** (30-plus, 21st, Paul) and **Yellowhammer** (11th, Paul). The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during October 2022 is: *Blackbird, Blackcap, Black-headed Gull, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff (incl. 2 SINGING on 13th), Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Common Gull, Common Magpie, Coot, Cormorant, Curlew, Dunnock, Farmyard / hybrid geese, Feral Pigeon, Goldcrest, Goldeneye, Goldfinch, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Grebe, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, Grey Wagtail, Greylag Goose (domestic), Herring Gull, Jackdaw (Eurasian), Kestrel, Kingfisher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Linnet, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Long-tailed Tit, Mallard, Mistle Thrush, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Pheasant, Pied Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose, Redwing, Robin, Rook, Siskin, Skylark, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Starling, Stonechat, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Wood Pigeon, Wren, Yellowhammer.*

Mammals, amphibians and fish: As well as informing me of the **American Mink** seen some time ago, the Craigencalt head bailiff told me that fresh **Otter** spraint (poo) had been noticed at the loch edge by the fishermen's path sometime in the fortnight prior to our chat, which took place on 13 October – i.e., an Otter must have been around sometime in late September or early October although no-one apparently saw it. Apart from this, **Stoat**, **Roe Deer**, **Grey Squirrel** and fresh **Mole** hills were all recorded during the month.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): Even fewer invertebrates were spotted at the Loch during October than in

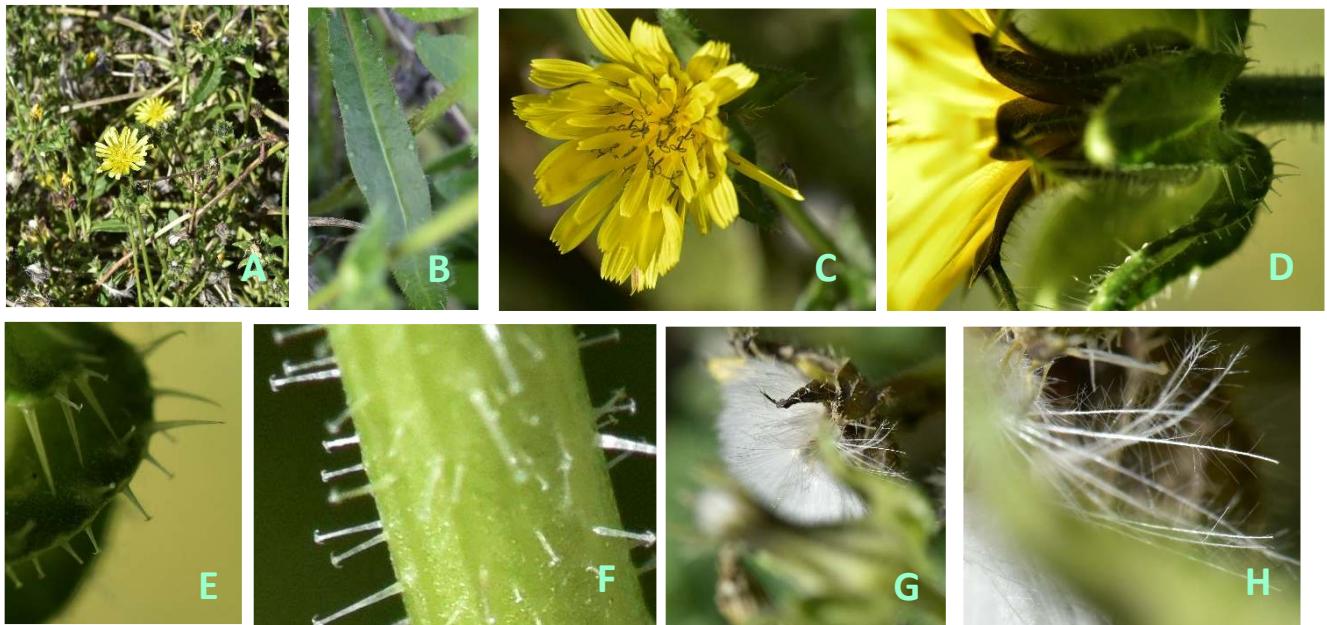


New invertebrate records from the Loch, October 2022. *Left:* December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*), 27th. Photo George Guthrie. *Right:* Raspberry Flea Beetle (*Batophila rubi*), 25th. Photo Robert Mill.

September. Two **butterfly** species were recorded. I did not expect that I would record a new butterfly species for the Loch as late as 10 October, but on that date I found a **Small Copper** resting on a Fennel flower-head in the nursery area with its wings closed. I stood beside it, camera ready for action, for over ten minutes in case it decided to spread its wings out. However, it was very shy and only opened its wings very slightly for a second or two to reveal the lovely copper-orange upperside with dark blackish spots. (See photos at top of first page). The only other butterfly I noted was a **Small White** on 13th. George

Guthrie did **moth** trapping at Craigencalt on 27th; this will be his last trapping session of 2022. He trapped 33 moths belonging to 15 different species. One of them, **December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*)**, was a new Loch record and also represents the first record of the moth family Lasiocampidae at the Loch. This family has around a dozen UK species including the eggar, lackey and lappet moths; most of them are uncommon (especially in Scotland). Besides George's 15 species, I found the mines of four leaf-mining moths during October but none were new records.

Common Darter dragonflies were seen on 13th by both Elaine O'Rourke and myself. **Bees and wasps** were seen even less frequently than in September; only **Common Carder Bee** (several dates all month) and **Common Wasp** were seen, the latter including a still-active nest near the foot of the track up to Craigencalt Farm. As in September, no **bugs** were found. October's only **beetle** was a new Loch record: a **Raspberry Flea Beetle** on 25th, appropriately on a raspberry leaf beside the fishermen's path. The only **hoverfly** species was **Banded Hoverfly** (most likely *Syrphus ribesii*) on 13th, while the mines of three different **leaf-mining flies** were also found, none of them being new records.

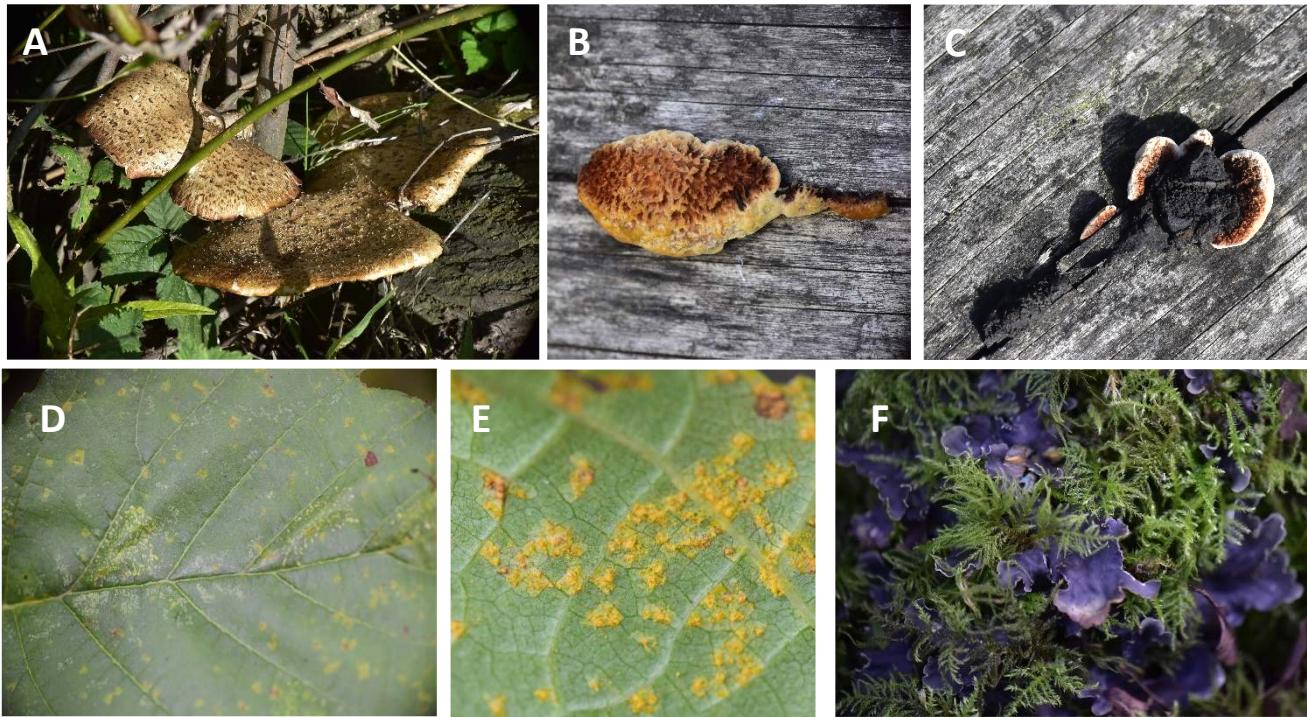


Bristly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echiooides*, synonym *Picris echiooides*). Set of photos showing diagnostic features. New Loch record, photos 10 and 13 October. **A.** Habit. **B.** Leaf showing 'pimples' on surface. **C.** Capitulum ('flower-head'). **D.** Involucre. **E & F.** Hooked hairs (glochids) on (E) involucre and (F) stem. **G.** Pappus. **H.** Feathery hairs on pappus. Photos Robert Mill.

Flowering plants and ferns: Four ferns were refound in October: **Bracken**, **Common Polypody**, **Hart's-tongue Fern** and **Wall-rue**. I noted 79 wild **flowering plant** species still in flower during October, a drop of 33 from September's 112. Another 34 or more cultivated species remained in flower as well, brightening up some of the plant beds in the Ecology Centre area. Despite the lateness of the season, I was once again able to add one new Loch record to its flowering plant list: **Bristly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echiooides*, or *Picris echiooides* in older flower books)**. I actually found this back in August when it had seemingly almost finished flowering and started to wither, but my photos at that time were insufficiently detailed to identify it. However, the wetter weather in September and October seemed to revive the mass of previously withering stems and it began to flower again. This time I was able to take a series of photographs showing diagnostic features that allowed me to tentatively identify it as Bristly Ox-tongue, a plant which has been very rarely recorded in Fife [at the time of publication of the most recent check-list, that of Ballantyne (2002), the most 'recent' Fife record was back in 1963]. Because of its apparent rarity locally, I sent my photographs to Sandy Edwards, the Fife official plant recorder for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. Not only did he confirm my identification, but he told me that the BSBI's Compositae identification workshop held at The Ecology Centre on 6 August had also found it where I had a couple of weeks later! Therefore, they must be given the credit for the Loch's 'first record' of this species. Sandy Edwards told me in his email that the Loch's mass of this species was impressive and that the only other Fife record was from Burntisland.

Cryptogams

Sixteen **fungi** species were noted during October. Lee Brown of TEC drew my attention to two fungi he had found on 10th and 11th and I went to the sites myself during my visit of 13th. Both turned out to be new Loch records: **Dryad's Saddle (*Cerioporus squamosus*, 10th)** and **Conifer Mazegill (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*, 11th)**. The only other identified 'mushrooms' were **Field Mushroom (*Agaricus campestris*)** found at the same spot as last month just north of the Ecology Centre 'HQ' on 10th, and **Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*)** fruiting-bodies emerging from the tree stumps in the former 'stumpery' on the same day. I found six different powdery mildews, all of them previously recorded. The month's third fungal NLR was a rust, ***Melampsoridium***



Fungi and lichens, October 2022. **A**, Dryad's Saddle (*Cerioporus squamosus*) on willow, 13th. NLR. **B & C**, Conifer Mazegill (*Gloeophyllum sepiarium*) on log used as a plant bed, 13th, NLR: **B**, young stage; **C**, older stage. **D & E**, alder rust (*Melampsoridium hiratsukanum*) on Alder leaf, 25th, NLR: **D**, upper leaf surface; **E**, lower leaf surface. **F**, The lichen *Peltigera hymenina* amongst moss on willow bough, 10th. All photos Robert Mill.

hiratsukanum on Alder leaves on a tree at the loch-side (25th). Four previously recorded **lichens** were noted again during October. Lastly, Raspberry Vein Chlorosis Virus (RVCV) was once again found on raspberry leaves by the fishermen's path where I found it last year.



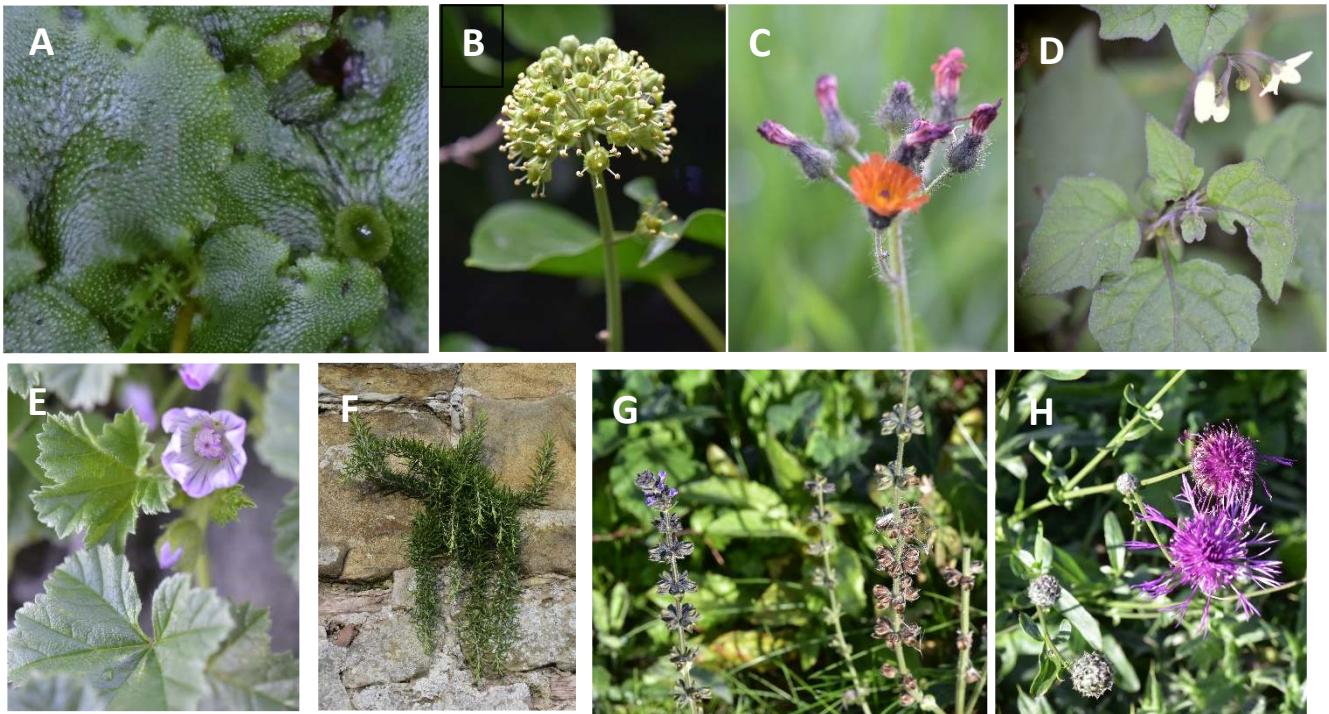
Michaelmas Daisy (*Symphyotrichum × salignum*) by coastal path,
26 October.
Photo Robert Mill.

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH Bottlenose Dolphins continued to frequent inshore waters off Kinghorn, with Bruce Meldrum posting yet more photographs of them on the Kinghorn District Wildlife Group Facebook page. Paul Williams also saw some off Seafield on 19th. He also noted that both **Grey** and **Harbour (Common) Seals** were present, and saw a **Weasel** on 14th.

Paul also noted more than 2,000 **Pink-footed Geese** on 21st in the field with the Ordnance Survey trig point next to the Kissing Trees road just above Red Path Brae and Cant Hill. He also saw a covey of seven **Grey Partridges** in the same field that day, as well as three **Red-legged Partridges** in the field opposite the Alcan entrance on the same day. Paul's October list for the Seafield-Kinghorn coastal path comprised 43 birds and six mammals which, as well as the ones mentioned above, included **Roe Deer** and **Rabbit**. **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Purple Sandpipers** were constantly present in the Seafield area, the maxima being on 24th: 5 godwits and more than 20 sandpipers. Single **Long-tailed Ducks** were there on 24th and

26th with two **Red-throated Divers** also in the area on 26th. **Guillemot**, **Razorbill** and a juvenile **Puffin** (19th) were also seen by him. A **Kingfisher** was by the sea on 24th and a small flock of **Tree Sparrows** near the Kinghorn caravan park on 26th.

Graham Sparshott conducted three bird migration watches in October, at Pettycur on 7th and 14th and from East Braes on 28th. All his records are available at <https://www.trektellen.org>. Some very large movements were noted, including 111 **Razorbills**, 149 **Pied/White Wagtails** and 370 **Meadow Pipits** on 7th, 156 **Little Gulls**, 760 **Gannets** and 1200 **Razorbills** on 14th, and 500 **Kittiwakes** on 28th when 15 **Long-tailed Ducks** and a **Slavonian Grebe** were present at East Braes.



Village plants, October 2022. A, The liverwort *Marchantia polymorpha*, 7th. B, Ivy (*Hedera helix*), 7th. C, Fox-and-Cubs (*Pilosella aurantiaca*), 7th. D, Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), 7th. E, Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*), 7th. F, Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*, formerly *Rosmarinus officinalis*), 2 m above ground on the harbour wall, 7th. G, Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*), Burnside Path, 13th. H, Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), Burnside Path, 13th. All photos Robert Mill.

On 7 October I again explored some of Kinghorn's minor streets and alley-ways, discovering the Doric Well Path (linking North Overgate with Castlehill Walk) for the first time. Here I found the liverwort ***Marchantia polymorpha*** on a damp stretch of the path but little else, partly due to the time of year and partly because much of the very narrow path is deeply shaded. **Ivy** was flowering on the Glamis 'Road' path, attracting pollinating wasps. **Fox-and-Cubs (*Pilosella aurantiaca*)** was still flowering on the Doo Dell paths and I was able to revisit some of the plants I found last month in the harbour area, such as **Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*, = *Rosmarinus officinalis*)** and **Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*)** and take photographs of them in much better weather; these are reproduced here.

On 11 October, I explored the Glamis Road footpath from King's Drive past the SW end of the Doric Well Path and as far as St Leonard's Lane. Once again there was plenty of **Ivy** in flower attracting wasps and other late pollinators. There were not many botanical highlights; they included a small self-sown plant of **Wall Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*)** on a brick wall by the King's Drive steps, whose presumed parent plant was in a garden several metres away. The typical 'wild' form of **Purple Toadflax** was in flower both by the King's Drive steps and along the Glamis Road footpath. Returning home after this walk, I explored the Burnside Path where I was astonished to find a couple of plants of **Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*)** in bloom. In Fife, this has been known as a Pettycur/Kinghorn local rarity for centuries but all the records have been strictly along the coastal cliffs, so to find it some distance inland by a newly renovated footpath was quite a surprise. I went back a couple of days later in better weather to photograph it and found a plant of **Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*)** nearby that I had missed previously. This was an equally unusual find; it does grow at The Ecology Centre but there it has been planted deliberately. Whether that is also the case with the Burnside Path plant, or whether it is the result of natural wind dispersal from The Ecology Centre, is unclear.

My wife and I walked along the coastal path from the village as far as the 'zig-zag' on 26 October. Most plants had finished flowering but there were still a few flowers on **Bloody Cranesbill**, **Michaelmas Daisy** and **Greater Periwinkle**. A **Red Admiral** butterfly was seen beside the path just past the caravans.

References

- BALLANTYNE, G.H. (2002). *Wild Flowers in Fife and Kinross*. Fife Nature.
MET OFFICE (1 November 2022). Mild October with interludes of rain. <<https://blog.metoffice.gov.uk/2022/11/01/mild-october-with-interludes-of-rain/>> accessed 1 November 2022.