

## **DRUMOIG WILDLIFE FORUM NEWSLETTER - MAY 2021**

So far, we have had no volunteers to take over Christine's role, in whole or in part. This is not a surprise as Christine did such a fantastic job that the idea of stepping in to her shoes is daunting. I am (sort of) volunteering to collate or edit a newsletter which will have a slightly different emphasis. I would hope we can continue with the nature articles but also cover events or happenings around Drumoig. I cannot do this without your help so please put your thinking caps on and send in photographs, articles, observations or whatever you think may be of interest to [kaymarthep1@aol.com](mailto:kaymarthep1@aol.com) and I will do my best to produce a DWF newsletter from time to time – the intervals will depend on how much input there is from our readers!

Can you remember how cold it was in winter? We had snow &/or ice on the ground for 6 weeks in January and February. The lakes were frozen for 6 weeks in a row accumulating a fair number of golf balls sitting on the surface.



Looking north with the Sidlaws visible top left. Looking south over the frozen lakes

I have been told that the water at the 11<sup>th</sup> hole is a magnet for golf balls and after the first season the lake was dredged and thousands of balls were retrieved! As far as I know the dredging has not been repeated....which probably accounts for the current high level of water!!



Two golf balls in the foreground.

Winter colours, ducks & ice

In the past our garden has been a pheasant's harem with 11 pheasants strutting their stuff all at once last year. This year we found a brown egg on our rockery which we have identified as a pheasant's egg. This solved a problem which we have pondered over for several years. When clearing our overgrown back garden, we came across numerous eggshells in the undergrowth and assumed the previous owners had disposed of their eggshells in a cavalier fashion!! It is now obvious that these were remnants from pheasants' nests. This is an easy mistake to make as chicken eggs measure approximately 6 – 7 cm long whereas a pheasant egg is 4.5 – 5.5 cm long. Pheasants, of course, are ground nesters and lay from April to June, so watch out for hens on their nest at this time of year. They normally lay a clutch of 8 – 15 eggs and they take 22 – 27 days to hatch. The chicks are able to fly after 12 to 14 days which is a good thing as they must be very vulnerable to predators such as foxes. Which leads me neatly on to another discovery in our overgrown garden – a fox's graveyard!!



Pheasant's nest



Pheasant's egg

Hen pheasant with 3 chicks below.  
6 pheasant chicks on the right.  
Photographs by Dave & Lil Smith.





Fox skull

Well, we thought winter was over at the beginning of April but we have been subjected to the frostiest April on record. Quite a few of our plants have been affected by the late frost. Many of the greens on the golf course have been damaged – it looked as if the greenkeepers had been too liberal with the fertiliser but we have been told that it is all due to the winter ice. The greens became waterlogged and then froze with ice about 2 inches thick & it stayed that way for about 6 weeks. When they tined the greens in March there was further frost which was able to penetrate to the roots and further damaged the grass.



Snow flurries in April!



Frost damaged greens

Last week we were treated to 3 deer chomping leaves from a tree over our back fence. The photos are taken from our kitchen window.



Down at the golf driving range the demolition of the Scottish Golf Union building revealed the “indoor hole”. This has now been levelled pending further development.



A Craigie resident reports that she was quite excited to hear a yellowhammer singing in her garden & even more so when it came onto her birdfeeder. The RSPB handbook confirms that it is an unusual visitor for gardens. Presumably it is nesting nearby. Apparently, the UK population has declined by 50% since 1970, which mirrors the other mainly farmland species – changed agricultural practices have reduced the number of weed seeds available.

The RSPB website has alerted us to the return of swallows, swifts, cuckoos, warblers and a whole host of other migrants newly returned from Africa. To quote from their website:-

“Swifts, in particular, are truly amazing birds, with those that return to the UK to breed having one of the longest annual bird migration journeys in the world. Weighing the same as a small bar of chocolate (45 grams), each swift travels around 14,000 miles (22,000 kilometres) every year... and that’s just the straight-line distance between points along their migration route. Swifts actually clock up many more miles of flight than this, because these birds do pretty much everything on the wing, including eating, drinking, resting and even mating.

Sadly, in just 20 years more than half of our swifts have vanished and we believe that a loss of nest sites here in the UK could be at least part of the problem.”

If you’re anything like me, you’ll have difficulty in remembering the differences between Swifts, Swallows and House Martins. Again, the RSPB website comes to the rescue:-

Swifts are:-

- **Dark sooty brown**
- **Can look black against the sky**
- **Crescent-shaped wingspan**

- **Short forked tail**
- **Bullet-shaped, almost dinosaur-like head**
- **You'll often hear them before you see them – they make an unmistakable, piercing, high-pitched “scream”**

**Swallows have:-**

- Distinctive long, forked tail with tail streamers
- Red throat
- White underside
- Blueish sheen to the head and back
- Swallows have longer wings than martins.

**House Martins are:-**

- Smaller than swifts or swallows
- Pure white underside
- Blue-black upper parts except for the white rump on its back
- Shorter wings than swifts or swallows
- Forked tail

House Martins will not be long in returning as some residents may well be aware. House Martins have taken quite a liking to the eaves of houses in Drumoig but are not as common as they were a few years ago.

Christine & Paul Edwards have added this section about Greenfinches:-

Greenfinches are large, chunky finches that are mostly olive-green, but with a yellow patch on the wings and tail. Females are grey-green with less yellow. The decrease in seed availability in the countryside saw a decline of Greenfinch population but they adapted by visiting garden feeders, they particularly like black sunflower seeds and sunflower hearts and peanuts. In winter they form flocks with other finches in the search for food. Greenfinches nest in small colonies in trees and bushes and the female lays between four and six eggs and the chicks are fully fledged 18 days after hatching, For more information follow this link: [Greenfinch Bird Facts | Carduelis Chloris - The RSPB](#)



Greenfinch (Carduelis Chloris)

Christine and Paul say it has been great to see Greenfinches back at their feeders this year, as it is many years since they have seen them.

There has been a rapid decline in the British Greenfinch population, reported to be 59% in the 10 years up to 2016. It has been widely acknowledged as being caused by *Trichomonosis* a disease caused by the protozoan parasite *Trichomonis gallinae*. The disease is also known as ‘canker’ when seen in pigeons and doves and ‘frounce’ when seen in birds of prey. *Trichomonosis* typically causes disease at the back of the throat and in the gullet and birds become lethargic and have difficulty in swallowing and have laboured breathing and swelling of the neck may be evident.

The best way to help garden birds avoid this disease is to adopt a regular hygiene routine of cleaning and disinfecting bird feeders and tables, (specially-designed products can be purchased from bird food suppliers). Rotating the position of feeders prevents the build-up of contamination in any one area of ground below the feeders. Bird baths should also be emptied and dried and refilled daily if possible. A leaflet providing additional background and guidance is available here: [Birds and Hygiene leaflet](#) (PDF, 886.20 KB)

The Garden Wildlife Health (GWH) is a collaborative project which aims to monitor the health of, and identify disease threats to, British wildlife. They focus on garden birds, amphibians, reptiles and hedgehogs and they rely on the public to submit reports of sick or dead wildlife. You can find out more about this at [About GWH - Garden Wildlife Health](#) and can report the death or illness of garden wildlife via their website at: [Garden Wildlife Health](#)

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Please remember to consider a contribution, large or small – the next newsletter will depend on it!! It has also been suggested that, with the lockdowns, residents will have been exploring new walking routes in and around Drumoig, or even further afield. If you would like to share your walking expertise, please let me know & I will include it in the next newsletter.

Martin Hepworth