

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 11 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022



A winter sunset taken by Sally Byers looking west from Pickletillum Avenue.

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THE WEATHER ROUNDUP.

November saw an impressive amount of rainfall of 150 mm – that’s 6 inches in old money! This is also twice the monthly projected average. There were only a few days of early morning frost and, generally speaking, it was much warmer than average. The lakes on the golf course filled up and some of the bunkers turned into ponds. Despite reasonable amounts of rain in September & October, it wasn’t until the heavy downpour of 15 mm on the 3rd November that the reed beds by the 18th tee finally filled up.



Reed beds during the summer.



Reed beds after heavy rain in November.

The 18th November saw 56 mm of rain (over 2 inches) in one day and we had the unusual phenomenon on the following day of seeing golfers walking on water!!



Golfers walking on water!!



Waterlogged area near the bridge at the 11th.

In mid-December the temperatures plummeted and we recorded a low of -7C. It was probably much lower but that was the temperature when we got up!! There was a lovely variety of hoar frost patterns:-



....and on the 16th December we had 7.5 cm (3 inches) of snow:-



The view from our front garden.

There was an impressive amount of rain in the last week of December making a total of 89 mm. Overall in 2022 we had a total of 612 mm which is 24 inches in old money, still 1 inch per month below the traditional levels.

ROSE HIP SYRUP REVISITED.

I've had a surprising number of responses from residents and friends who remember collecting rose hips while at Primary School. Lil Smith remembers collecting them at her school in the 1950's and being paid on a weight basis. A friend from Malta recalls rose hip syrup being sold in his mother's pharmacy in the 1960's. As previously mentioned, rose hip syrup was a prominent part of child health care in the 1940's and 1950's because of its high vitamin C content.

Another health food of the time was "Virol", a brown, sweet, sticky malt extract. Originally it was made from red bone marrow extracted from the ribs of cows, beef fat, malt, eggs and lemon or orange juice. It was packed full of nutrients, including vitamins A, B & D. Apparently, a "Virol Lady" used to visit schools weekly and, for a penny, you got a spoonful of Virol. According to one report, the Virol Lady had a giant key ring hung with hundreds of battered spoons so that each child got a clean spoon. It must have been quite a job cleaning the spoons afterwards!



Courtesy of Wikipedia.

Virol was produced by Bovril in 1899 and then set up as a separate company. Pre WW2 it became associated with Ambrosia to produce "Virol & milk" as a direct rival to Horlicks. Production ceased during WW2 as it was too expensive to produce but resumed after the war when the company changed hands several times. Although Virol now seems to have disappeared, it is still available from Holland & Barretts in the form of malt extract, apparently made to the same recipe! And malt extract even gets a mention in *The House at Pooh Corner* – Kanga gives baby Roo malt extract as a "strengthening medicine"!

CARROTS PART 2 – Rob Pirie.

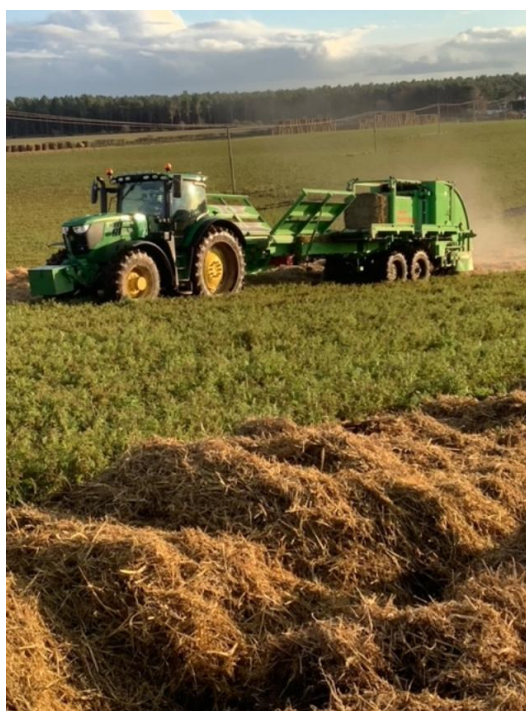
Following on from the last newsletter I have at last been able to take some pictures of the happin (covering) of the carrots!

A contractor with two machines is currently (11th December) employed completing the task. The machine carries 9 straw bales which are fed through chopping blades at the rear and spreads it out over the carrots. Part of the field has black plastic rolled out under the straw, other parts don't, for reasons I can't answer! The loaded machine weighs approximately 15 tonnes and is pulled by a 9 tonne tractor.

I'm told the straw will protect the carrots from frost down to -15/20 C.



1. Machine almost empty lowering its "wings" for more bales. 2. Loading bales.



3. Fully loaded, 9 bales.

4. Spreading



5. Plastic below straw

BITS & BOBS.

1. We recently noticed a damp patch in our bedroom ceiling. It was due to a broken roof tile under the solar panels but the roofer also discovered a wasp nest under the solar panels:-





This is a much larger affair than the previous nest we reported in newsletter number 8. However, many years ago, in our Victorian house in Newport we had a very big wasp nest removed from our attic which was about twice the size of a football!!

The smaller wasp nests seen last summer.

2. We have a Rowan tree in our garden with a profusion of heavy red berries. Well, it did have a profusion of berries! In November we noticed a flock of about 20 or 30 starling-sized birds which descended on the tree and stripped it bare in less than 20 minutes. The lighting was poor and we could not easily identify them. However, a few days later Paul Edwards told me about a flock of Fieldfares and Redwings which had stripped berries off his trees and the penny dropped. Fieldfares & Redwings are starling-sized birds which migrate to the UK in late autumn – berries feature in their diet!! Waxwings are similar sized birds with a crest and striking colouring; they migrate from Scandinavia in late autumn and also have an appetite for red berries but are more sporadic visitors.



Fieldfare



Redwing



Waxwing

All photographs courtesy of the RSPB website.

Steve Norrie then sent me a couple of photos of a redwing in his garden, complete with berries!!



Redwing



Redwing and red berries.

3. "Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie" – an appropriate topic for this time of year! John Cuthbertson told me that he had recently had an influx of field mice and had caught 7. That made me realise that we, too, had evidence of mice in our roof space and in our floored loft above the garage. For some reason they seem to enjoy chewing plastic but I can't think it does them any good. I set some traps and we caught 6 mice over a few days. There must be some surviving mice who are a bit smarter as the cheese has disappeared without triggering the trap!!
Of more concern is the odd report of rats, usually feeding off bird tables. So, if you have an open bird table, please be aware that they can attract rats. There are various devices which can discourage rats such as metal sleeves around supporting poles etc. Rat poison is also effective but should be used with care in areas where other animals have access.
4. The new housing development is cracking on at a great rate of knots. Work has now started on the hill overlooking the driving range and everything looks on schedule for the expected completion date of June 2023. The last 2 months has seen roadworks and a lot of mud on the road which is inevitable given the amount of rain we have had. Only 6 months to go before normal service is resumed!!

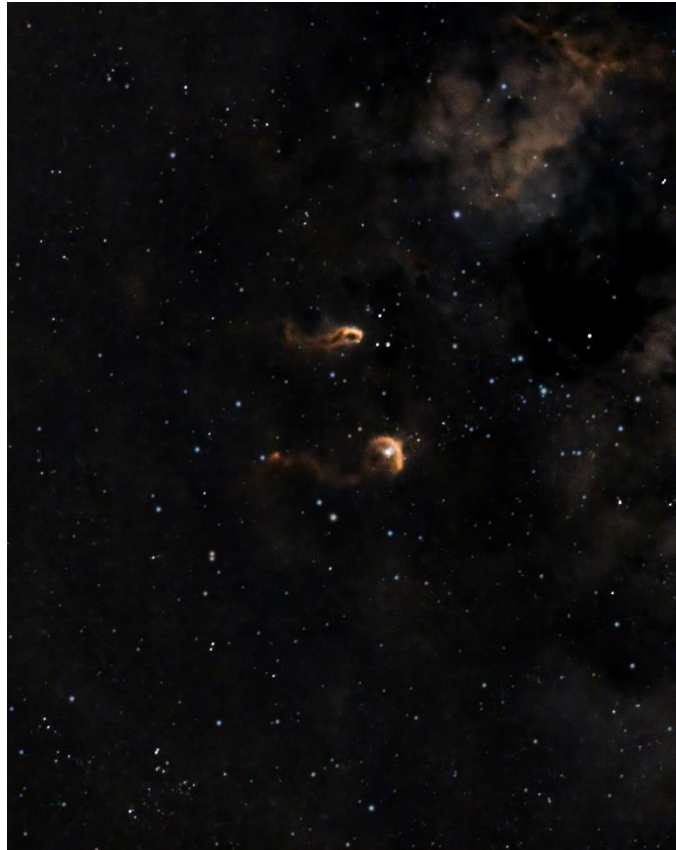
WINTER SKY – Steve Norrie

Although the days are now getting longer it is still the dark sky feast time for astronomers. Notwithstanding a near full Moon the Quadrantids meteor display on the night of 4th January is well worth popping out for – weather permitting – as it is one of the strongest shooting star displays of the year.

The two bright planets in the evening sky, Mars, and Jupiter, position themselves close to the Moon with Mars closing on the 3rd of January and Jupiter on the 26th... no need for a telescope or binoculars just go outside and enjoy the spectacle with the naked eye.

Orion continues to dominate the sky with its twinkling red Betelgeuse star in the top left and the Auriga constellation with the "yellow" bright Capella rising to a near vertical position.

Within Auriga lies the deep sky nebulosity feature IC410 which is also referred to as the Tadpoles – see below image from Drumoig this month.



And yes, the Artemis Moon rocket finally launched and returned safely to Earth after its voyage round the Moon albeit with no crew. Next up a crewed attempt! – volunteers from Drumoig required.

As always, many thanks to our contributors but this newsletter will not happen unless you, the members, contribute. Please, please, please send me any observations, comments or photographs – there's always something of interest happening around Drumoig!

A happy and healthful 2023 to all our readers and a special welcome to our new residents.

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