

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 12 – **JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023**



A winter sunburst over Tentsmuir Forest from Broughty Ferry beach.

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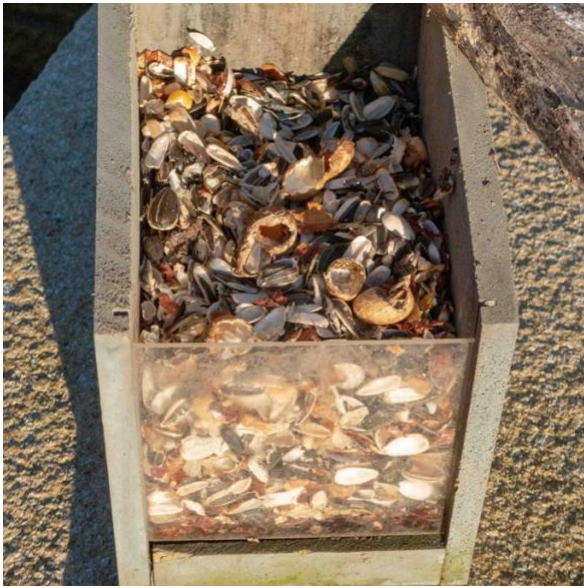
THE WEATHER ROUNDUP.

January was an odd month with only 27.9mm of rain, over 90% being in the first half of the month. Last year’s January figure was 16.9mm. We had some cold days with lows of – 3.8C but the second half of the month was milder than usual.

February was very low on rainfall at 20mm, considerably down on last February’s 52.5mm. One of the weather reporters on TV said that the average temperature in February was 3 degrees higher than average! This certainly fits in with our impression in that we have had very few days with a hard frost.

SQUIRRELS AND FEEDERS.

We recently noticed that “our” red squirrel had not visited as often as usual. This puzzled us as, from our kitchen window, our squirrel feeder still looked full. How wrong can you be?! Closer inspection revealed that the squirrel feeder was full but.....it was full of nut husks. Even worse, the bottom layer of nuts had rotted down to a sludgy paste.



The “empty” squirrel feeder.



The squirrel feeder contents spread out.

The old contents were discarded, the feeder cleaned out and refilled with fresh nuts and, hey-ho, our squirrel returned. This reminded me that I had given everyone a lecture in a previous newsletter about keeping bird and squirrel feeders clean, excellent advice which I had failed to follow. Here are a few pictures of “our” red squirrel –





While we are talking about squirrels, Margaret Wells drew my attention to the following information about squirrels in our neck of the woods –

“RSST (Red Squirrel Survival Trust) have secured funding to run a community project to co-ordinate red squirrel conservation and grey squirrel management across Fife and the Eastern Lowlands for 2 years.

This new project will be independent from, but work closely with, SSRS (Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels). If you are interested in getting involved and want to find out more, please email mark.henderson@rsst.org.uk. 🐾”

The RSPB gives the following advice about bird feeders:-

It’s very important to keep bird feeders, tables and baths clean to stop a build-up of bacteria and viruses that can spread [diseases and infections](#) among garden birds.

- Clean your feeders every week.
- Wear gloves and use warm soapy water.
- Scrub feeders inside and out using a strong, long bristled brush. Do this in a bucket, not in your kitchen sink.
- Use a mild, non-toxic [disinfectant](#).
- Make sure the feeder is thoroughly dry before refilling it with food.

The RSPB also give excellent advice about different birds and their feeding habits and requirements:-

There are lots of different bird foods available, including mixes for bird feeders and bird tables, as well as for ground feeding. Winter is a time when natural food shortages could occur and these foods can help the birds out during this time.

- [Blackbirds](#) mostly feed on the ground and will eat a broad range of foods, from fatty nibbles to mealworms.
- [Blue tits](#) and [great tits](#) use both a feeder and a bird table, eating seeds as well as suet and peanuts.
- Finches, including [chaffinches](#) and [greenfinches](#), also use both a feeder and a bird table, and they love sunflower hearts. But don't forget to clean them weekly to avoid spreading disease.
- Look for good quality bird food – those that don't include 'fillers' such as dried peas and beans that birds rarely eat.
- You can put out [leftovers](#) such as dried fruit, or fruit such as apples and pears. Don't use anything mouldy or salty though, and if you have a dog don't put out dried fruit – vine fruits such as raisins can be toxic to them.

I have had several reports of rats feeding on and around bird tables. In those circumstances it is probably better to temporarily stop putting bird food out and eliminate the rats before re-stocking.

OUR VERY FRIENDLY ROBIN. – John Cuthbertson

John Cuthbertson has sent this information about his friendly robin -

For the last few weeks every time we open our front door our friendly Robin appears. As we give him/her a frequent treat we are now always pleased to see Robin. Robin has become very 'tame' and will rarely fly away when we meet. Sometimes a blackbird likes to 'muscle' in especially when Robin gets a treat. However, Robin always seems to be around first and must wait for us opening the front door even when it is getting dark. We do have a lot of small birds in our garden feeding on nuts and fat balls but Robin prefers 'personal' feeding.



Although our robin is very tame it doesn't seem to like getting its photo taken! It came in the front door yesterday when Moira turned her back after opening the door.



Moira feeding "her" robin.

AN INQUISITIVE STOAT.



John Rust from Craigie Hill sent me this picture of a stoat. John wrote "I put down my things to tie up my bootlaces and when I turned round, I found this little fellow on my things. I think it's a well-fed stoat."

It certainly looks like a stoat in its winter fur. With climate change one wonders whether animals such as stoats, mountain hares, arctic foxes etc will evolve out of their winter coats and remain the same all year round!

THE HUMBLE CARROT (part 3) -Rob Pirie

From field to plate or even cake!

It's only 6 weeks since I reported the carrots in the field at Fordelhill were being covered with their winter coat of straw, which was incidentally, just in the nick of time as "Jack Frost" arrived with a vengeance within days and lasted for weeks!

Surprisingly during the third week in January harvesting of these carrots commenced in earnest. This early start is due to shortage of supply and can be put down to a couple of climate related incidents. Many of the crops grown, particularly in England, suffered from

stress due to dry conditions during the growing period with the subsequent reduction in yield. On top of that many crops in these areas were not protected in any way, as Fordelhill's were, and have been badly damaged or simply ruined by the severe frosts.



"The Green Machine" -

This machine is used to pick up the protective straw bed from the top of the carrots, finely chop it and spread it onto the already harvested land. This organic matter will then be ploughed in.

The carrots currently being harvested are all making their way south of the border to a pack house near Blackpool where, according to farmer James Orr, he can achieve the best price. A simple case of supply and demand and market forces.

James also told me, due to these climate related problems there will be a shortfall of supply by about 4-6 weeks between the 2022 and 2023 crop within the UK and imports will be required to bridge the gap

"The Blue Machine" – the harvester -

The brush on the front of the tractor clears the remaining straw and earth from the top of the bed of carrots before the harvester digs them up and passes them over the elevator, removing soil and stones before they are carefully dropped into the trailer behind the second tractor.



Incidentally the field at Fordelhill is approximately 50 acres and James would expect a yield of 40/50 tonnes/acre but due to the dry conditions experienced in the summer he expects

yields to only be 60/70% of normal. The crop following the carrots, in the spring, will be Broccoli, whilst the top end of the field adjacent to Craigie Hill will be potatoes.



“The Red Machine” - The Pre-Cleaner – the harvested carrots are passed over this machine to further remove soil, stones or any other foreign bodies before they are loaded onto the lorry for transportation to the pack house where they are washed, graded and packed for onward distribution to retailers etc.

During the time of following up on the carrot story residents in Craigie Hill were suffering an obnoxious aroma (stink!) this can be put down to effluent from the anaerobic digester plant at Peacehill being spread on the fields. I’m informed it will be quickly ploughed in.

A FRIEND OF MINE (yes, I do have a few!) from “over the water” – Dundee, not France – recently sent me this account involving a new bird feeder. This “dog-in-the-manger pigeon normally sits, sulking on the roof of the original bird table, unable to access the food, but deterring others”. His wife recently bought a small bird feeder and within seconds of its installation the fiendish pigeon appeared and balanced precariously on the branch above. There was an initial flurry of interest from the smaller birds but sadly the presence of the evil pigeon seems to have established its malevolent influence.



The evil pigeon.

So, Dundee gardens don't seem to be that much different from Drumoig gardens except, perhaps, that we have more crows and magpies, as well as pesky pigeons – oh, yes, I forgot the phrisky pheasants! We have certainly noticed that crows and magpies balance precariously on the top of our bird feeder poles and attempt to shake seeds out so that they can then pick them up from the ground. Originally, they managed to dislodge the bird feeders completely, scattering seeds everywhere but cable ties have resolved that problem.

BADGER SETTS.

Drumoig has areas of badger activity and this is a time of year when a badger sett may be more easily visible. The entrance to a badger sett is usually in woodland &/or in heavy undergrowth – the latter has died back at this time of year. Paul Edwards has recorded badger activity on his remote wildlife camera and the footage is on the DRA website under Drumoig Wildlife Forum – wildlife videos.

We recently spotted the entrances to a sett in a long grass/nettle area on the golf course. There were multiple entrances spread over a 12-metre-wide area, but whether they were active or not I don't know.



First entrance to sett.



Second entrance to sett.

Sett tunnels are usually between 0.5 and 2 metres beneath the ground, and they include larger chambers used for sleeping or rearing young. These chambers are lined with bedding material such as dried grass, straw, dead leaves or bracken. The entrances are approximately 30cm (12inches) across but can be used by rabbits and foxes once the badgers have vacated them. Badgers are nocturnal animals which explains why they are rarely seen. Badgers have also been implicated in the spread of TB to farm animals and efforts to cull them in some areas have been controversial and largely unsuccessful.

BIRD BOX REPORT - from Christine Edwards.

Paul and I have undertaken the annual survey of bird boxes, installed around Drumoig. We started the 2022 season with **36** boxes. Of these **27** boxes had nests, **5** no nests and **4** were damaged beyond repair. Although the success rate is very encouraging, we did find 2 nests with dead chicks; one with 2 chicks - no feathers; 1 with one dead chick with feathers and 3 nests each with 1 unhatched egg in. This is the first time we have seen this and don't know whether this was due to the weather, cold and wet in the early season, very hot when they may have had a second brood, lack of food or predation of the adult birds, hopefully this won't happen this year.



Each of our boxes is numbered and located in the woodlands around the Drumoig golf course. The process is to check all the boxes, clean them and undertake any maintenance required. Currently we have the boxes marked out on paper maps but have just started to use the App – What Three Words, which gives us a precise location.

The bird boxes are made up of **18** Schwegler bird boxes (below on left), these are made from Woodcrete a unique mix of sawdust, concrete and clay making them maintenance free and rot proof for up to 25 years. **7** are excellent wooden bird boxes made by Alec Burden, Craigie Hill (below in middle) and **11** are the remainder of the twenty wooden boxes originally installed in 2017 (below on right), **4** of these were found this year to be damaged beyond repair and **7** are not wearing well and will need replacing at the end of this season.



Thanks again to Alec who has again come to the rescue and has made 6 more sturdy bird boxes which we used to replace those damaged. In addition, Alec has made 5 excellent new owl boxes to add to the one already in place and these have now been installed by Alec and Paul. The wood for these boxes was kindly donated by Kirkwood Homes.



The National Nest Box Week 2023 ran from Tuesday 14 - Tuesday 21st February.

This is a celebratory period aimed at encouraging more people to help birds by putting up nest boxes and is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. Birds are now starting to prepare for their busiest time of year. The main nesting season runs from March through to August, but rather aptly, birds are traditionally thought to have paired up by Valentine’s Day, hence the start date of 14th February.

Many of us are aware of how vital it is to feed our garden birds, but it's also just as important that they have a suitable shelter and site for breeding. With natural habitats such as trees and hedgerows being lost to development and the increase in urban housing, some of our garden birds struggle to find a safe shelter to rear their young.

If you would like to do something to help improve the chances for birds to have a successful season why not site a nest box in your garden or outdoor area, this will provide them with a clean, warm environment to lay their eggs and raise their chicks. For more information go to: [National Nest Box Week 2023 | CJ Wildlife \(birdfood.co.uk\)](https://www.birdfood.co.uk/national-nest-box-week-2023)

As we now start the 2023 season with our clean, sturdy, well mapped boxes our thanks as always go to Ian Menzies, Drumoig Turf Maintenance for allowing us to install these boxes in the woods around the golf course. We look forward to another successful breeding season.

SPRING SKY – by Steve Norrie

The clocks go forward on 20th March so the opportunity to view the night sky decreases as does the Orion constellation which is slowly sinking lower to the west before disappearing till next Autumn. The Plough, or Great Bear constellation, now rises high in the sky and even with binoculars will reveal a host of treasures such as M51, the Whirlpool galaxy, and the Pinwheel galaxy - M101. These galaxies will appear as “fuzz” patches with no colour – colour images are normally obtained by use of colour filters using a mono Astro imaging camera.

These objects are best seen in a dark sky area which unfortunately Drumoig is not but at least it is better than a town/city area.

Despite our less than perfect sky the familiar summer triangle formed by the bright stars, Deneb, Vega and Altair, will soon dominate overhead hopefully heralding a warm summer to come!

Planets

Mars although high in the sky is moving further away and reducing in apparent size but still emits a nice red colour. Venus is the brightest object in the early evening sky in the west and best observed once the sun has fully set below the horizon. Jupiter now lower in the sky and soon to disappear for a while. You may have noticed that Jupiter and Venus are rapidly converging in the evening sky, and on March 2 they will pass only 0.5 deg apart – splendidly placed for northern hemisphere observers in Drumoig.



M51 This galaxy is known as the “Whirlpool” Galaxy.

The spot to the left is NGC 5195 which got too close to M51 and is now “attached”.



M101 – also known as the Pinwheel Galaxy.

A FEW PHOTOS – Steve Norrie sent in these photos.



Moorhen (excuse the wire netting!)



A Wren.



This superb photo of a Sparrowhawk was taken by Steve Norrie but a Sparrowhawk was also seen in David Smith's Garden (Craigie).

WHAT ABOUT THE BUILDING SITE?

As we can all see, the building site is progressing and is on schedule to complete by the end of June. We may soon see the end of heavy traffic on Forgan Drive as the site to the south of Forgan Drive is nearing completion. We can now get an idea of how the new entrance may look as the scaffolding is coming down.



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 special welcome to our new residents.

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