

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 16
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023



The St. Andrews skyline from the south– September 2023

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THE WEATHER ROUNDUP.

September was another peculiar month! We were blessed with 9 consecutive days of sunlight and warm weather at the beginning of the month with temperatures reaching into the low 20’s. Further south it was much hotter with temperatures straddling the 30-degree mark. Inevitably we had rain on 17 of the next 21 days totalling 57mm for the month compared with 68mm in September 2022.

October also began with warmer weather than usual, although it was nowhere near as warm as southern England. Instead, we had 75mm of rain straddling the 3 days of the 7th, 8th & 9th of October. There then followed 9 consecutive dry days before Storm Babet struck. We were on the edge of the storm but Brechin seemed to suffer most with floods and, sadly, loss of life. From the 19th until the end of the month we had significant rain most days with a peak of 40.5mm on the 20th. The total for the month looks as if it will exceed 180mm (that’s over 7 inches in old money) more than any month since I started recording rainfall by a large margin.

THE NATURE OF SCOTLAND AWARDS 2023.

In April I was amazed to receive an e-mail from the RSPB which ran as follows - “We’ve come across your Drumoig Resident’s Association Wildlife Forum newsletter and would like to invite you to submit an application for the Nature of Scotland Award.” The e-mail went on to describe 10 possible categories, the “Community Initiative” category being the obvious one for us to enter.

Like a job application or an entry such as this, one doesn’t have a clue what they are looking for! Christine Edwards stepped into the breach and gave me considerable guidance with the application form, which was most appropriate as she had played a pivotal role in setting up

the Wildlife Forum in 2017. We emphasised the bird and owl boxes and the informative outings and talks that Christine had originally initiated, and, of course, the newsletter. The deal was that every entrant was invited to a reception in the Scottish Parliament in September with the short-listed entrants being invited to a black-tie award ceremony in the EICC in November. Thus, it came to pass that Kay & I were invited to the award event in the Parliament building on the 20th September. The dress code was “business attire” and, being an oldie, I ferreted out my suit and a tie. We almost thought we were at the wrong function as the dress code was anything but formal. I spent a great deal of time speculating on what sort of business each individual attire represented – one young lady in particular attracted a lot of attention as she was wearing half a dress with a variety of tattoos diving in and out of her dress!!



(To avoid confusion, my first name is David, although I am known as Martin, and Kay's Sunday name is Kathleen!)



In the reception area



The event was held in the lobby to the debating chamber.

We were amazed to find that there were 175 delegates and it was also obvious that most of the projects were very professional affairs which had significant sponsorship from major and local businesses or Councils. Given this background it came as no surprise to learn that we were not short-listed! To give you a flavour of the 6 projects short-listed in our category here are a few of the titles –

- 50 years of the Bailies of Benachie.
- Community power to understand the Forth's marine mammals.
- Langholm's Community Buy-out.

There were 8 sponsors for the event itself which would have a quite significant cost – 175 guests with free drinks and canapes, plus the Award ceremony in November, where a non-sponsored ticket is £68!

In summary, you could say that it was an interesting experience.



Colin Smyth MSP welcomed delegatesand Francesca Osowska, CEO of Nature Scotland

A RED ADMIRAL.

No, this isn't a Russian warship off the coast of Fife! I recently spotted this Red Admiral in our garden, no doubt enticed out by the glorious first 9 days of September.



Anything with orange or red on its wings tends to be identified as “A Red Admiral” because there are plenty of butterflies which have a similar colouring such as the Painted Lady, Tortoiseshell, and Peacock butterflies. “When I were a lad” Red Admirals seemed to be much more common but in Scotland they have been less common until climate change has tempted them north again.

Every year, starting in spring, there is a northwards migration from North Africa and Europe. The immigrant females lay eggs and consequently there is an emergence of fresh butterflies from July onwards. They can still be seen as late as October or November. The main food source for the caterpillars is the common nettle.

....AND A SPECKLED WOOD BUTTERFLY.

Steve Norrie sent me this picture of a Speckled Wood butterfly. I had seen one in my own



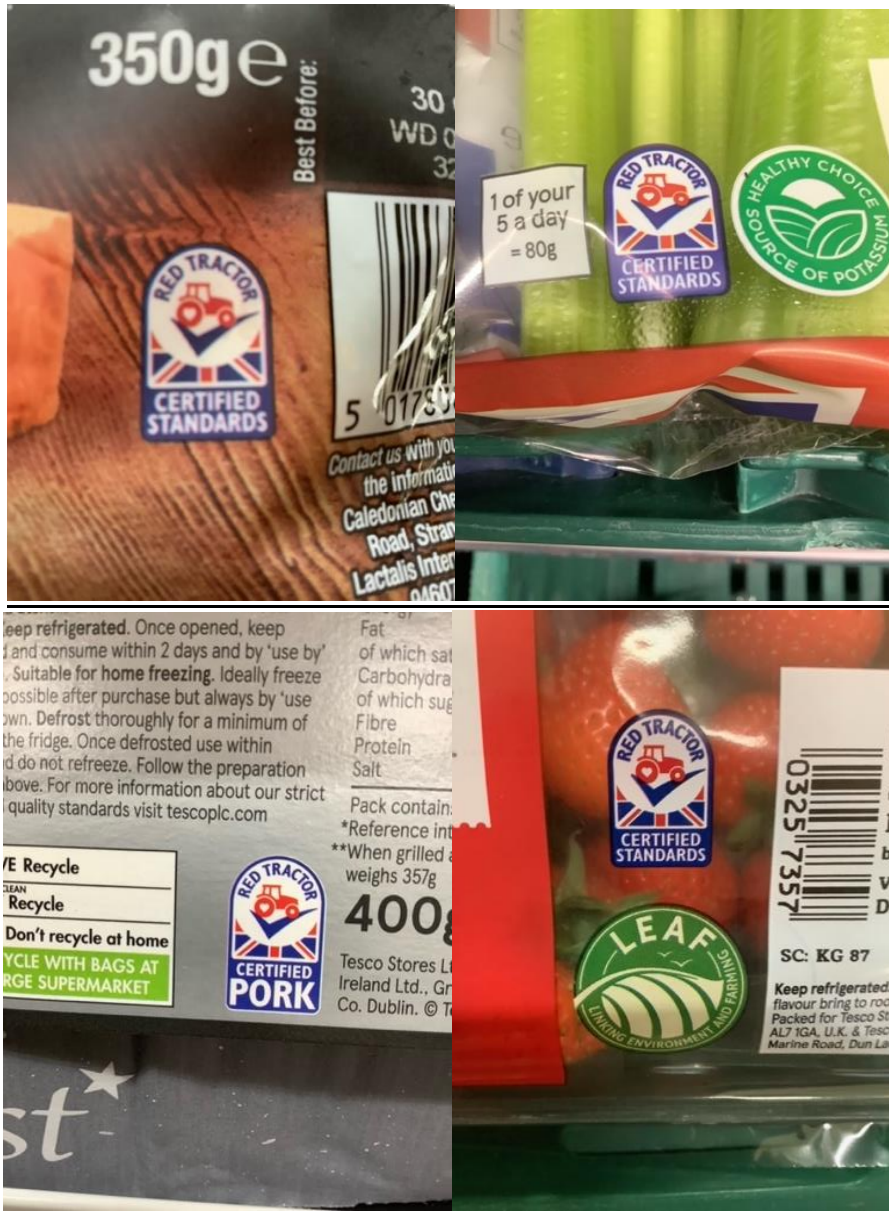
garden but it disappeared before I could get a picture...honest!!

These butterflies fly in shaded woodland and dappled sunlight. They feed on honeydew in the treetops and, rarely, on flowers. The distribution of these butterflies contracted in the 19th and early 20th centuries but the last 2 decades has seen them spread back to northern England and Scotland.

FARM ASSURANCE by Rob Pirie

Most of the food we buy and eat from supermarkets and retailers is covered by some form of farm/food assurance which means the producer (farmer/growers) conforms to a strict set of standards and guidelines agreed by the entire food & farming industry. The most recognisable is the “RED TRACTOR” which is the mark of the Assured Food Standards, launched in 2000 by the National Farmers Union of England & Wales - this mark can be seen on a large number of products we buy whether it be soft fruit, vegetables, fresh meat and poultry, or further processed foods such as milk, cheese, bread, meat and dairy products to name but a few. The term “fork or field to plate” is often used and a very high percentage of the products we buy are covered by these sets of standards.

The Red Tractor logo means that the food you buy has been responsibly sourced, safely produced and comes from crops and animals that have been well cared for.



Here in Scotland, which, by the way, pioneered farm assurance back in the 1980's, we conform to more or less identical standards to the Red Tractor scheme but have their own marks such as Scottish Quality Crops (SQC) for all combinable crops, (barley, wheat, oats, and oilseed rape) and Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) for beef, lamb & pork. Under this scheme, all livestock must have been born, reared and slaughtered in Scotland and spent their entire life on QMS Assured holdings. Farmers/Producers can choose to use the Scottish or England and Wales marks depending on the markets they supply.



A number of Certification Bodies which are accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) carry out the audits, on behalf of the Standard holders, mostly on an annual basis and any non-compliances to the standards found have to be rectified within an agreed timescale before certification can be granted or renewed. The standards for all the schemes are very comprehensive and cover all aspects of the production cycle from the management of the land, the fertiliser and spray chemicals used, the grain storage and handling, vermin control, to name but a few. On livestock it's also about the highest standards of production, animal welfare and well-being.

Many of these audits can take up to a day depending on the size or the number of crops grown, or the number of units to be inspected as well as livestock numbers, housing etc. One of the many important elements of all the schemes is good record keeping, whether it be spray chemical/fertiliser application records or cleaning records for stores and machinery or animal numbers and veterinary medicine records; they are essential as are risk assessments systems based on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control point (HACCP).

For some farmer /growers wishing to supply the higher end retailers, all the above standards continue to apply but there is a requirement to go one step further and comply with LEAF standards (Linking Environment and Farming).

This mark adds additional standards including pollution control, soil management, nature



conservation, energy efficiency, water and by-product management and many, many others. A number of the vegetable and soft fruit farmers previously mentioned in the Wildlife Newsletters are both Leaf and Red Tractor registered farmer/growers.

On a similar basis many livestock farmers supplying the same higher end retailers can, if they wish adopt the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) accredited assurance scheme. This scheme homes in on higher “well-fare” standards including living conditions, stocking numbers etc and hygiene for all animals albeit chickens, dairy cows, pigs, turkeys or salmon and more. The British Lion stamp on eggs is another example of food assurance and over 90% of eggs carry this mark.



For the Organic farmer/grower there are obviously different standards and these are set, controlled, and certified by the Soil Association and/or Organic Farmers & Growers. Both organic marks can be seen regularly on produce from Soil Association and Organic Farmers & Growers farms.

When it comes to imported foodstuffs, the ball is more in the supermarkets and major retailers court as they make many of the decisions on where and what to buy and they use standard setting and certification bodies such as Global Gap and British Retail Consortium Global Services (BRCGS) to maintain and certify a high level of food quality and safety throughout the world, very similar to the high standards set in the UK

All the aforementioned schemes add to consumer confidence in the produce we buy, so when you next see crops being harvested or livestock in the fields or pick up produce from the shelf in the shop you can be sure the vast majority are covered by some form of assurance. They do come at a considerable cost to the farmer/producer in monetary terms as well as time, but are essential to supply most of the current markets.



PS. On a different tack residents will have noticed considerable activity recently on James Orr's field adjacent to Craigie Hill. The bottom half of the field which featured carrots last Autumn/ Winter was followed by a crop of Broccoli, whilst the top half of the field featured Potatoes which were planted in the spring. Both crops have recently been harvested and very quickly the whole 100+ acres ploughed and drilled with winter wheat which will normally be harvested in August next year. The whole operation has been done very professionally and with great efficiency.

BITS AND BOBS.

- 1. PARTRIDGES** are a sporadic sighting in Drumoig. Carolynn Murray, one of our newer residents, noticed this covey in her garden in Drumoig Way in September.



Partridge are a game bird, of course, and have a very distinctive and startling “drum-beat” sound to their flight when disturbed. Many years ago, I remember driving along the mile-long gravel road which is the back entrance to Birkhill House from Balmerino, and counting over 100 partridges and pheasants on the road, filling their crops with the gravel.

2.MUSHROOMS GALORE.

The season of mists and mellow mushrooms (& toadstools) is upon us! The recent damp autumnal weather has produced a bumper crop of fungi everywhere. Here is a selection from our garden –



The deadly redcaps!

3. AUTUMNAL COLOURS.

Our Rhus plant shows the sequence of autumnal colours



4. SPIDER'S WEBS are a common sight at this time of year as they are more easily seen when laden with dew or after a rain shower.



If you look closely at the right-hand web you can see the rainbow spectrum in the dew drops.

5. MORE ABOUT SQUIRRELS!

Derek & Shirley Fegen of Comerton Place sent me this e-mail about “their” squirrel –

“Two years ago, we had a red squirrel living in our garden and usually seen climbing the wall above our conservatory to disappear under the eaves. I checked the attic regularly but there was no sign of it entering the house despite a daily sighting, disappearing under the eaves. I left a humane trap there just in case.

In the past few days, a squirrel has arrived at the same place and I wonder if it is the same one. It's taken off to the front of the house each time it's spotted us. Beautiful animals despite their potential destructive nature and it's been good to see it back if it is the same one. We also have had a few of these small toads in our garden."



6. ANOTHER SHIELD BUG.



I noticed this rather colourful shield bug in our garden in mid-October. I think it is a Birch shieldbug (*Elasmotethus interstinctus*). It is very similar to the Hawthorn shieldbug but smaller (12mm in length). It is common and widespread across the UK, and hibernates in winter. The nymphs mainly feed on birch and aspen, which we have in our garden, and also hazel.

This is an archive photo from Getty Images



7. PROGRESS ON THE PLAYPARK – AT LAST!

There are signs of activity at the playpark. The basic equipment has been installed, along with park benches and paths, and the earth mound is gradually being redistributed prior to seeding (although that may be delayed until the spring).



8. Steve Norrie found this wasp, possibly a queen, hibernating inside his observatory

Fortunately for Steve it thought better of its location and flew off.... but not before he got this stunning picture!!



Steve also got this picture of a “sparrow fest” at his birdfeeder.



THE SCOTTIE TRAIL /SCOTTIES BY THE SEA.

Many of you will have noticed the publicity about the Scottie Trail of 30 giant Scottie Dog sculptures. Following on from the “Oor Willie” and the “golf bags” in previous years, the aim is to raise money for Maggie Cancer Care Centres. This year local artists have been involved in the decoration and, although the majority are in St. Andrews, other communities throughout Fife have been involved from Newport and Tayport close to us, to as far away as Leven. The dogs will be on view for 10 weeks.

It took a long time for the penny to drop that a Scottie was chosen because of its resemblance to the Fife coastline as seen on a map!



Rikki O'Neill (a local artist) has decorated the Scottie outside the Larick Centre in Tayport.



Some of the Scotties in St. Andrews.

If you go onto the “Scottiesbythesea” website you can download a map and see details of other (charity) merchandise. It’s fun following the trail and also a worthy cause.

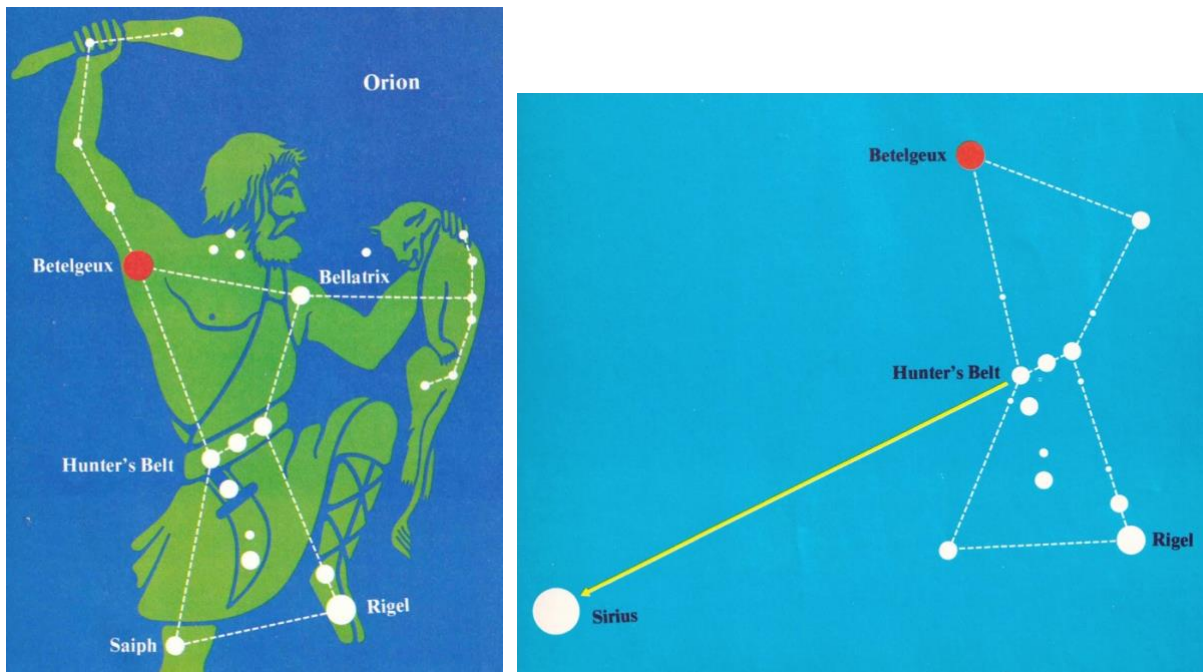


Winter Sky 2023 – Steve Norrie

As winter approaches, the Orion constellation (located on the celestial equator) now rises in the east and it is an object that can be seen throughout the world.

This constellation is named after the hunter in Greek mythology and is one of the most obvious and recognizable constellations in the night sky. Two of the ten brightest stars in the

sky are found in Orion — Rigel (Beta Orionis) and Betelgeuse (Alpha Orionis) with both showing a red hue when viewed with averted vision.



Orion is identified by finding the Sword Belt. The Belt is formed by three bright stars - Alnilam, Mintaka and Alnitak. Note that Orion is viewed with a southerly aspect as we are in the Northern Hemisphere. Betelgeuse, the second brightest star in Orion establishes the right shoulder of the hunter and Bellatrix serves as Orion's left shoulder. Other stars in the constellation include Hatsya, which establishes the tip of Orion's sword that hangs off the belt, and Meissa, which forms Orion's head. Saiph serves as Orion's right knee. Rigel, Orion's brightest star, forms the hunter's left knee.

With one exception, all the main stars in Orion are bright young blue giants or super-giants, ranging in distance from Bellatrix (243 light-years) to Alnilam (1,360 light-years). The Orion Nebula is located around 1,350 light-years away from Earth. One light-year is the distance light travels in a single year, about 6 trillion miles!

The exception is Betelgeuse, which is a red giant and one of the largest stars known. Drumoig skywatchers with a keen eye should be able to see the difference in colour between Betelgeuse and all the other stars in Orion.

If you use averted vision and glance below the three stars of Orion's belt, you should be able to make out the Orion Nebula as a smudge in a dark, light pollution-free sky with your naked eye. The Orion Nebula — a formation of dust, hydrogen, helium and other ionized gases rather than a star — is the middle "star" in Orion's sword, which hangs below Orion's Belt. It is one of the brightest nebulae in the sky, according to NASA.

Light Pollution. Once your eyes are dark-adjusted, try counting the number of stars within the four outer stars of Orion and this number will give you an indication of the amount of light pollution. Less than 10 proves severe light pollution and for a true dark site you would count 30+. So please switch off unnecessary outside lights (will save you money as well!)



M42 in Orion. (The smudge below the Belt!)

DRA “MEET THE NEIGHBOURS” GET-TOGETHER 24TH SEPTEMBER.

Upwards of 60 residents attended a get-together at the Drumoig hotel in the afternoon of 24th September. The Chairman of the DRA, Euan McGregor, welcomed the newcomers and outlined a brief history of Drumoig and the work of the DRA. A very convivial afternoon passed quickly and many contacts were made both for established and new residents.



The assembled through...and Chairman Euan McGregor welcoming everyone.

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!**

Martin Hepworth: kaymarthep1@aol.com

