

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 17
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Winter moonrise over Tay estuary.

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THE WEATHER ROUNDUP.

The final figure for rainfall in October was 175.7mm. As we were away at the end of October and early November, many thanks go to our neighbour, Frank Tennant, for recording the rainfall in our absence. Here is a photo of the course towards the end of October :-



For the sake of clarity, the natural pond is in the centre background!

November had 59.9mm of rain (compared to 147mm in November 2022) but temperatures were certainly much milder than usual with only a few days of frost. December started with several cold mornings with temperatures dipping to -6.9 degrees. This was followed by a total of 19 days of rain with the heaviest rain reserved for Storm Gerrit on the 27th December, when we had 30mm in one day. Locally, there was some flooding in Cupar and the railway line

between Leuchars and Cupar was closed due to a landslip. The total rainfall for December was 115.5mm.

The total annual rainfall for 2023 was 715.9mm, but almost 50% (351.1mm) fell in the last 3 months. Comparative figures for 2022 are an annual total of 612mm with 306.8mm falling in the last 3 months

BATS – Christine & Paul Edwards.

In mid October we opened up our patio umbrella to dry it out before storing it for the winter. To our surprise we found this Common Pipistrelle bat inside. We googled 'what to do if you find a bat' and it said we should leave it where it was as it wouldn't move in the day in fear of predators. So, we left it open and it finally flew off after dark.



Information from the Bat Conservation Trust and The Wildlife Trust websites say that Common pipistrelles are the smallest and most common bat in the UK weighing around 5 grams (same as a 20p piece). They are nocturnal and feed on midges, moths and other flying insects that they find in the dark by using echolocation; a single pipistrelle can eat 3,000 tiny insects in just one night! They roost in tree holes, bat boxes and even the roof spaces of houses, often in small colonies. During the summer, females form maternity colonies and have just a single pup each. Look out for common pipistrelles darting about as they hunt for insects in gardens or around streetlights just after sunset. They hibernate over winter, usually between November and April, but may come out to feed on warm days.

For more information go to [UK Bats - Types of bats - Bat Conservation Trust](#) or [Common pipistrelle | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

RED LILY BEETLE - Joy Treit, Comerton Place.

I love lilies and have enjoyed growing them mostly in garden containers for many years with great success.



For some unknown reason this year they seemed to be struggling to be their best. Although I checked them regularly, I could not find a reason why.

I did see one or two oval shaped holes & eventually I spotted a bright red critter on the underside of a leaf. After some investigation I found out this was a Red Lily

Beetle, the most serious pest of lilies, which had been having a field day in my pots.



More than likely, they have been hiding from me from the previous year.

Needless to say most of my lilies have been destroyed, having found they had even eaten the roots of the bulbs.

So gardeners beware of these little blighters.

I intend starting replanting again next year. Fingers crossed 🤞

A little bit about the Red Lily Beetle.

The Red Lily Beetle eats the leaves, stems, buds and flowers. They are very difficult to spot as when they detect any sign of danger, they drop off the leaf backwards, landing on their red backs with their black underbelly facing up making them next to impossible to see in soil. The bright red beetle is about 10mm long. The small black larvae of the Lily Beetle leave small

black holes in the flowers and leaves. They cover themselves in excrement disguising themselves as bird droppings. They hide in the soil and come out in early spring just as the lilies begin to emerge. They are very difficult to get rid of. They can also fly really well and can quite easily spread from garden to garden in the Autumn.

TREECREEPER – Michael & Jeanie Duncan.

This bird flew into one of our windows this morning and stunned itself.



It sat on the path outside the window for some time in the pouring rain. I took a few pictures of it. Jeanie thought it was too vulnerable so I went out to move it at which point it flew into a nearby rose bush, see last rather indifferent photo. After sometime it started to climb to the top of the bush and finally took off into a nearby tree. I think the bird is a tree creeper. We have seen a few occasionally over the past few years but usually on our line of rowan trees along the road side of the house.

Editor – this is indeed a tree creeper! They are about 12.5cm and are smaller than a great tit. They have a long downcurved bill and long, stiff tail feathers. They are widespread in the UK and there are thought to be approximately 240,000 pairs in the UK. They tend to breed in coniferous and deciduous woods, and feed on insects including crickets, earwigs, stoneflies and also caterpillars. The female incubates 5 – 6 eggs for about 14 days and the young fly after about 14 days. There are often 2 broods a year.



Here are 2 pictures taken from the RSPB handbook -



BIRD BOX REPORT - from Christine Edwards.

Paul and I have undertaken the annual survey of bird boxes, installed around Drumoig. We started the 2023 season with 40 boxes, of these the 9 original wooden boxes installed in 2018 were found to have been damaged beyond repair. This damage has been caused by the heavy rain and winds. Of the balance (31 boxes) a total of 25 had nests in them and 6 had no nests. Thankfully this year we did not find any evidence of unhatched eggs or dead chicks, like we did last year.

Each of our boxes is numbered and located in the woodlands around the Drumoig Golf course. We checked and cleaned the boxes and luckily for those left, no maintenance was required. The photos below show the two types of boxes we have; on the left the Schwegler boxes (we have 18), these are made of Woodcrete, a unique mix of sawdust, concrete and clay, this one shows the lovely compact nest the birds built and on the right one of the 13 wooden boxes made by Alec Burden.



Schwegler nest box



Wooden nest box

The photos below show two nests we found: on the left one lined with cosy feathers, and on the right a more colourful one with varying twine.



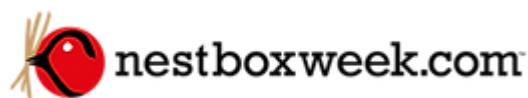
Nest with feathers



Nest with feathers and coloured twine.

Our 6 Owl boxes are all in good condition, however due to the height we were unable to check them but hope to put a nature camera out by one next year to monitor activity.

As we move towards the 2024 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.



The National Nest Box Week is an annual event that takes place every February. In 2024 it will run from Wednesday 14th – Wednesday 21st February 2024. This marks the beginning of the breeding season for birds and people are encouraged to set up nest boxes in their gardens to help with this. If you are interested in participating visit the website [National Nestbox Week | Nestbox Week](https://www.nestboxweek.com) where you can learn how to choose a great nest box, where to put it and how to look after it. 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.

FAIRY RING – Christine Edwards.



Whilst undertaking our bird box survey, we came across this large fairy ring of fungi. Fairy rings are caused by an individual fungus growing underground. The fungus sprouts lots of small threads, called mycelium, in a circular shape. A year later, the mushrooms pop up out of the ground at the edge of the circle, creating the fairy ring. The circle will start off small in size, getting bigger as it gets older.

Different countries across Europe have their own folklore tales about fairy rings. In English and Celtic folklore, fairy rings were caused by

fairies or elves dancing in a circle. It was said that if humans joined in the dance they would be punished by the fairies and made to dance in the ring until they passed out from exhaustion. So just a warning – don't go down to the woods and dance!

After some research I discovered the fungi in this ring are Cloudy Clitocybe (*Clitocybe nebularis*). It is commonly known as the clouded agaric or cloud funnel, is an abundant gilled fungus which appears both in conifer-dominated forests and broadleaved woodland in Europe and North America. The best time of year to see them is late summer to early autumn, and they are more likely to appear after wet weather. It can cause severe gastric issues in roughly 1 out of 5 people. With those odds I think I'd rather look at its beauty and not taste it.



WOODPECKERS.

Bryan Knight sent me these photos of a woodpecker at his bird feeder. It is a female Great Spotted Woodpecker and is certainly one of our more colourful birds – the male has a red patch on the back of its head. It is estimated that there are 37,000 to 44,000 breeding pairs, so it is not uncommon but not necessarily seen frequently.



As it happens, Steve Norrie has also come up with photos of a woodpecker. I suspect this is a male woodpecker as there is a hint of a red patch on the back of its head.



Steve's male woodpecker – spot the difference!

LATE WINTER SKY 2024 – Steve Norrie.

Planets.

Jupiter continues to dominate the night sky (...if only the clouds would clear...) and outshines every evening-time night body apart from the Moon. Using binoculars to view Jupiter will reveal its oblate (flattened) disc and the four bright Galilean moons of Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto. If you have a small telescope, you may pick out the banding of the Jovian gas clouds.

Mercury and **Venus** also provide entertainment for early risers with Venus a dazzling sight in the southeast early dawn light.

Mercury climbs a bit lower in altitude and you will need a clear horizon to observe as it only elevates to about 6 degrees. If it is clear on the morning of 8th January, you can see both planets alongside a crescent Moon so a chance to snap an image with your phone camera.

Meteors.

The **Quadrantids** meteor shower can produce up to 60-200 streaks per hour and if clear on 4th January at around 5 AM you could be treated to a splendid display! The Quadrantids have also been known to produce fireballs! Good hunting!

Steve has also contributed more of his stunning photos-



Long-tailed tits – who obviously like fat balls!



A robin (who also likes fat balls!)..... and a heron.

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 NEW YEAR
TO ALL OUR READERS!***

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