

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 18
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024



Gulls on ice!!!

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THE WEATHER ROUNDUP.

I think everyone would agree that January was a miserable month - cold spells, warm spells, two, or was it 3 storms? - and 30mm of rain to add to the mix. We had the faintest sprinkling of snow and, despite the misery, we seemed to miss the worst of the weather which was only a few miles away in Angus.

According to the TV weather forecasters, February was the wettest February ever...but not in Drumoig! – this probably emphasises that we have a bit of a micro-climate going for us! We had 27mm which is marginally more than last year’s 20mm. It may have felt more as any rain was falling on sodden ground and, indeed, the total for January and February this year was 66.6mm compared to 47.9mm last year.



The reed beds in late afternoon with a colourful lens flare when taken into the sun



The frozen lakes on a cold day.

THE WREN -Jennifer Laidlaw.

I have rarely given any thought to one of the UK's smallest birds, the Wren, other than to recall that it appeared on that long-forgotten coin, the Farthing. That all changed yesterday when I found a wren using my lounge as an aviary! I am nervous of birds at any time but even this tiny wren that flew at great speed managed to fill me with fear.

Observing the bird behind the glass door I was pleased to see it hopping about my poinsettia plant which had grown in size in the three years that it had pride of place in the lounge. Next resting place was the mantelpiece where it merged in beautifully with the other ornaments.

As darkness came, however, I grew more anxious about how to persuade the wren to go outside again. It was reluctant to do so and as it was around minus 6 degrees who could blame it? There was no chance of catching it, certainly not by myself, as it flew at such speed.

My neighbour, Steve Norrie, gave me support and suggested that the best line of action was to keep it inside overnight otherwise it would surely die from the extreme cold. He would look by in the morning to assess the situation.

I shut all the doors and retired to bed but did not sleep a wink worrying about this little bird. I was up every hour just to see if all was quiet and the bird was hopefully asleep.

By morning Ian Menzies also came to my aid and searched every nook and cranny of the lounge to find the wren. I assured him that it had to be there.....was it in a deep sleep?.....That was not the case. It had found a really cosy spot and sadly died.

I made the mistake of looking up Google to read more about the wren and discovered that, in some cultures, a wren flying into your house is a bad omen and yet in other countries the wren is a bringer of good luck. I like to think it is the latter!

In 24 hours, my emotions for the wee wren went from fear of it to real sadness of a little life lost most probably because of the intense cold which is affecting so much of our wildlife.

Editor – The wren is not quite Britain’s smallest bird; that accolade goes to the Goldcrest at 9cm long, whereas the wren is marginally bigger at 9-10cm long.



In case you’ve forgotten, Steve Norrie had a nice photo of a wren in his garden in newsletter number 12.

As Jennifer mentioned the wren appeared on the farthing, a fact that some of our older readers will remember. The wren was on the reverse of the farthing from 1937 (George V1) until the coin was discontinued in 1956.

The younger readers will be asking “what on earth is a farthing?” – a farthing was a quarter of an old penny which meant that there were 960 farthings to the pound!!



Farthings go back to the time of Charles the second and in its heyday over 30 million were struck per annum! If you’re still awake, the story does not end there – at one time or another in our history there were half farthings, one third farthings and even quarter farthings!!! – that’s 3,800 to the pound!! If you could remember all that, you could be a candidate for Mastermind!

BIRD BOX UPDATE – Christine Edwards.

As advised in the December newsletter, damage to some of our old wooden boxes meant that we only had 30 nest boxes left. Many thanks therefore go to Alec Burden, Craigie Hill who has once again come to our rescue and has made and donated another excellent set of 6 new boxes.



These have now been installed, using What 3 Words to identify their locations, in time for the National Nest Box Week which runs from Wednesday 14th – Wednesday 21st February 2024. For more information on this event – please click on the following link [National Nest Box Week 2024 | CJ Wildlife \(birdfood.co.uk\)](#)

BTO WETLAND BIRDS SURVEY – Christine & Paul Edwards



In 2023 the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) put out a request via the Drumoig Secretary for someone to undertake a bird count at the Drumoig Ponds on the golf course, so Paul and I volunteered! This involves, visiting the ponds once a month (on dates set by them) and counting the wildfowl and waders present and then entering the data into their Wetland Birds Survey (WEBS). The WEBS annual report is published each spring and the data useful for policy makers. The ponds at Drumoig are said to hold a small but interesting population of waterfowl and they believe it would make an interesting introduction to WEBS. Our first count was on 19 November, and we will keep you updated as to our progress throughout the year. Interestingly the January WeBS Core Count we have just completed coincides with the International Waterbird Census (IWC). This is a yearly count of waterbirds organised by Wetlands International. 143 countries carry out one off counts at wetland habitats during the IWC count weekend and January WeBS Core Counts always feeds into this database. This makes January an important count as not only are migratory species that arrive in the UK over winter counted but our ponds have become part of an international counting effort.

The studies from IWC look at whole populations of waterbirds and their trends, such as how they shift across countries in response to climate change. In addition to this annual count, every three years there is the East Atlantic Flyway total count. January 2023 was the last flyway count, so the next will be January 2026. You can read more about IWC here: - <https://www.wetlands.org/knowledge-base/international-waterbird-census/>

The BTO have a range of surveys and in addition to the one we are doing there is the Garden Birdwatch. Although many of you will be aware of the annual Garden Bird watch organised by the RSPB, the BTO version is an all-year-round affair and consequently provides more information about the garden bird population relating to events in the wider countryside. More information on how you can join the Garden Birdwatch survey can be found here <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>

THE HUMBLE OAT -from our farming correspondent Rob Pirie.

In the days before mechanisation on farms the horse was the mainstay of farming; farm size was often judged by the number of pairs of horses and likewise the number of “ploughmen” needed to work with each pair. They would feed them, yoke them (attaching the harness to the horse and the plough or other implement) and work many a long day walking behind them. To keep these horses in a fit and healthy state oats were the main source of feed, normally “rolled” or “bruised”, so it was essential that oats were grown in fairly large quantities for this purpose.

Alongside this oatmeal or brose, the name given to the oat kernel after the outer husk is removed, was also one of the mainstays of country people and many oatmeal mills, mainly water powered, similar to the National Trusts mill at Barry, producing oatmeal in a number of forms. Incidentally my maternal Grandfather and two generations before him worked the mill at Monikie, the remains of which can still be seen from Monikie Church.

After World War 2 mechanisation on farms really took off and the tractor quickly replaced the horse, and the necessity to grow oats in great quantities declined in favour of other cereal and root crops.

In recent years oats have started to come back into fashion due to their health food properties. Old style porridge oats, rolled oats in many different variations, oat milk and many other products have helped increase the area of oats sown, mainly under contract to companies similar to Quaker near Cupar. Recent figures for the 2023 crop indicate the area sown in Scotland was around 34,000 ha with production of about 225,000 tons.

Obtaining further information from our local producer (Quaker) about where they source their oats and tonnage used etc was difficult as they do not share such information out with the Company! all the available information can be found on the back of the packaging (I was told!).

From said packaging they inform that all their oats are grown on British farms keeping food miles to a minimum and all their growers are passionate about sustainability, so they’ve partnered with LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming). Together they’re committed to increase biodiversity and wildlife conservation, nourishing the soil for our planet. Their rolled oats are 100% whole grain with no added sugar, high in fibre and help lower cholesterol.

The Humble Oat has become a healthy sought-after cereal for the future, not just for horses and no longer humble!

BITS AND BOBS.

1. Caleb Walker from Drumoig Way reported on the partridges in his garden.:-

“Over the last couple of months, we’ve been frequently visited by a number of partridges (not entirely sure what kind).

They were chicks last year, but they’ve kept coming back all through the winter months and happily all 8 still appear to be with us, albeit a bit rounder.”



Editor -These are Grey Partridges and are very handsome birds! As can be seen from the photo they have a very attractive orange/red colouration to the head. The males are slightly larger and have a bigger horseshoe-shaped apron on their bellies. They nest on the ground, often by a hedge or dense foliage. They lay 13 – 16 eggs in late April and May. The chicks are fully grown in about 100 days but stay with their parents for their first winter.

I hesitate to say this but partridge is good to eat - a sort of cross between pheasant and chicken!! I know this because we lived in Northern Canada 50 years ago and we used to see them frequently when walking in the bush. They were a common game bird, but they were a different variety - a universally grey colour all over. We used to disturb them when out in the bush and their wing beat had a characteristic throbbing/whirring sound which usually gave you quite a start!

2. Caleb sent another picture a few days later:-

“This morning I spotted what looks like a Hawk or some other kind of raptor in the trees in my garden, pictures below.”



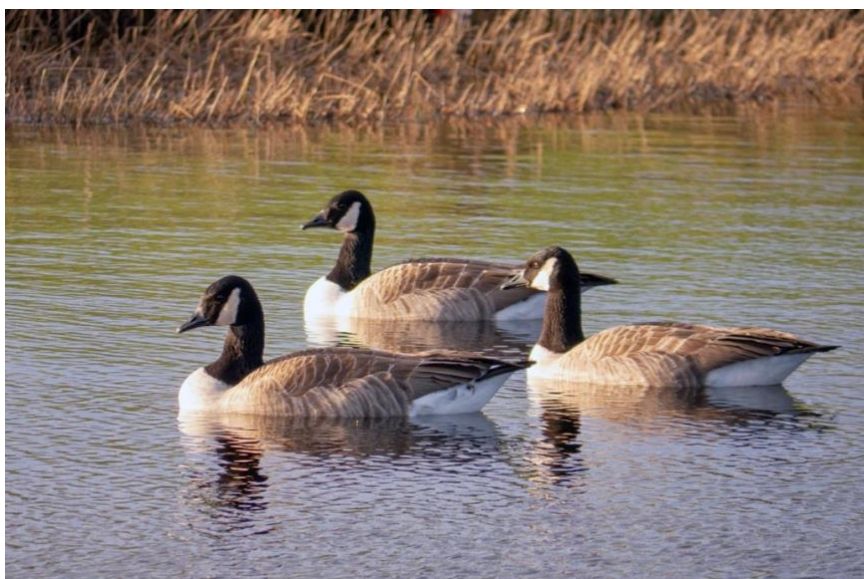
Calebs photo



Picture of a buzzard (RSPB handbook)

Editor – I'm pretty sure this is a buzzard with its yellow curved beak and yellow legs. Note how well camouflaged it is against the tree! We have been commenting that we haven't seen as many buzzards this year and have also heard this from other folk. Superficially, in flight, they may be confused with an eagle but eagles are much bigger and fly much higher. Very, very occasionally we have seen a white-tailed eagle (AKA sea eagle) because they nest in Tentsmuir forest – so keep your eyes open!!

3. **Canada Geese**. I realised that we have neglected the geese that frequent our lakes so I recently went to photograph them.



Although these are Canada Geese they do not migrate here from Canada! They are native to North America but were introduced here in the 17th century. There are approximately 82,500 in the UK. They do not migrate great distances but do move north or south, depending on the season. They have a characteristic white chin-strap.

4. A Forgan Drive resident recently pointed out that she hadn't seen any deer recently. This triggered the observation that we hadn't seen any recently near our house or on the golf course, although we have seen them in fields in the vicinity. Have you seen any recently?

The same resident also reminded me she had seen swarms of what she thought were rooks at dawn and sunset. We had inadvertently also seen the same swarms – they were bigger birds than the starlings that you see in murmuration's but we found them difficult to identify because of the fading light and tending to see them as a silhouette. Rookeries can extend from a few nests up to a 1,000. Rooks are slightly smaller than a crow but are twice as numerous with over a million nesting pairs in the UK. There are certainly plenty of crows in Drumoig and, at times, it seems most of them are in our garden where they aggressively harry our red squirrel and pester the birds round our bird feeders!! Traditionally, crows are seen in pairs but our Forgan observer also sees them in groups of 3, 4 or 5.

5. **Amaryllis.** I had always thought that the Amaryllis was a house plant usually grown around Christmas and the new year.



A Craigie resident recently sent me this photo of his amaryllis which had flowered 2 years ago and then been put aside and forgotten about. Recently he noticed that it was sprouting and a few weeks later, this was the result! We had always thrown out our amaryllises after they had flowered, but now we know better!!.....and think of the money it would save, re-cycling this year after year!

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!**

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