

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 4 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

September saw 43.8mm of rain spread over 17 days with half of the rainfall occurring on 2 days. October was a warmer month than usual but there was rain on 24 days totalling 97mm. The heaviest day was the 17th October with 23mm but 39mm fell in the last 5 days.

After the last newsletter I had an enquiry about the crops seen in the fields around Drumoig. I made some enquiries through secretary Ian and Rob Pirie came up with the following answer:- "The crop nearest the houses is broccoli. If it's the fields south of Craigie Hill I think they are talking about what's described as a green cover crop which will be eaten down by sheep in the autumn/ spring then ploughed in before a crop is planted in the spring. It's in an effort to avoid winter run off from bare ploughed land."

Even better than this snippet of information was a further response from Rob who volunteered to write a series of articles about the farms surrounding Drumoig. I presume most of us are regular customers of the "Strawberry Hut" near Forgan roundabout – well, here's the lowdown on the source of the soft fruit:-

H. Adamson & Son Wester Friarton Farm Newport

Keith Adamson runs Wester Friarton Farm predominantly as a soft fruit and livestock (beef production) enterprise.

All the soft fruit produced, Strawberries, Blueberries and Raspberries are grown in 220 poly tunnels covering 37 acres (15ha) on the farm, they are marketed by Angus Soft Fruits, the major soft fruit marketing group based near Carnoustie in Angus.

134 tunnels produce approximately 220 tonnes of strawberries, 82 tunnels produce approximately 50 tonnes of blueberries and the remaining 4 tunnels produce raspberries for sale mainly through the Strawberry Shed near Forgan roundabout, along with delicious fresh strawberries. The main growing and harvesting period runs from late April through to early October, picking takes place by up to 40 staff from 5am each day, the berries are then held in cold storage until they are transferred, on the same day, to the final packing station near Carnoustie before onward distribution to retail outlets. Each tunnel has its own bumble bee hive and the increasing use of "bio" controls in tunnels, insects eating troublesome insects, costing £10k, helps eliminate the use of spray chemicals.

Keith's commercial livestock enterprise comprises of both Charolais and Shorthorn breeds. Two bulls, one of each breed run with 85 cows, the subsequent offspring going to commercial beef production for local butchers.

Wester Friarton Farm is approximately 600 acres including 150 acres of grass/grazing land of which 115 acres lies on the higher ground going west above Newport. Third party sheep are normally grazed there over winter as well as cattle at other times. All the other arable land is farmed under contract by a local farmer who grows wheat, oats, potatoes and rye, the latter being cut green for inclusion to the anaerobic digester at Peacehill Farm in Wormit. The straw from the wheat and oat crops, in round bales, are returned to Friarton farm for use as cattle

bedding and feed. Farm Yard manure (FYM) or more commonly known in Scotland as “dung” produced by the cattle over winter is then returned and incorporated into the land.

I regularly hear confusion about Hay bales and their mistaken identity.

Virtually everything you see in fields following harvest are STRAW bales, the residue left after the combines have harvested the wheat/barley/oats. They are normally in round or very large square bales - they are used for livestock bedding/ feeding or as we see locally covering crops of carrots/parsnips for protection from winter frosts.

HAY is grass which is normally cut in June/July, left to dry then baled for winter animal feed, including horses. Other grass crops are silage which is cut green and kept in large clamps or haylage which is similar to silage but kept in large round bales and wrapped in material similar to cling film. All for winter “keep” (feed).

They dined on mince, and slices of quince.....

Earlier this year we purchased a shrub for our landscaping in the back garden – Chaenomeles X superba also known as Japonica, Flowering Quince or Japanese Quince. I had heard of quince jelly and preserve but had no idea what a quince plant looked like. Naturally enough there are quite a few varieties and they seem to originate from Japan. They were first recorded in England in 1275 when Edward I had some planted in the Tower of London.

Quince are related to the apple and pear families and, indeed, the fruit resembles a small pear. Our plant duly produced 4 fruits although they were a bit shrivelled up by the time I picked them!



Most varieties of quince are too tart to be eaten raw so Edward Lear’s idea of dining on “slices of quince” is a bit fanciful but, of course, the whole of “The Owl and the Pussycat” is written as nonsense! The “runcible spoon” is pure invention and was Lear’s way of teasing a friend called Runcy. As the years went by this did not stop people inventing a real runcible spoon which became defined as “a fork with 3 broad prongs, one having a sharp edge” and commonly used with pickles!!

Quince has a high pectin level which explains its use in jellies and preserves. It is a commercial crop and 692,000 tonnes are grown annually with Turkey and China being responsible for over 40% of production.

In future years I don't envisage commercial quince production nor will we be using quince on my salad as the seeds are poisonous!

*“They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon”*

We are fortunate to have a number of talented people living in Drumoig. One of them is Steve Norrie, our local astronomer, who has agreed to tell us a little about our night sky from time to time. Here is his first missive:-

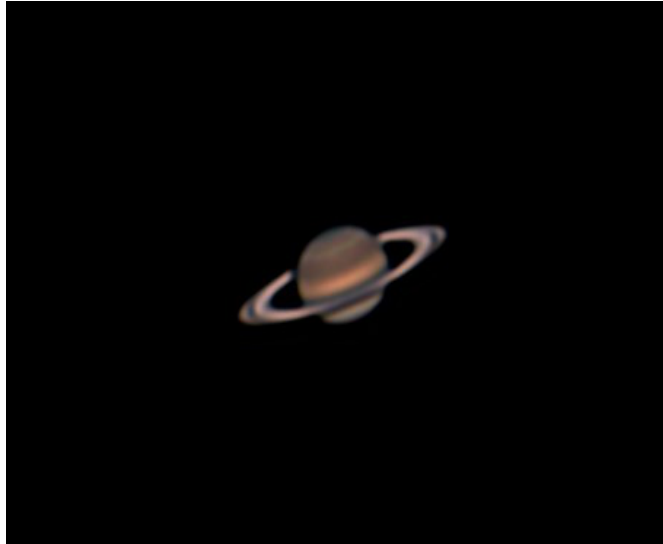
Winter Night Sky

A Bortle sky number is a way of classifying light pollution restricting your ability to view a dark sky – for Drumoig it is classed as Bortle 4.* This means we are in a rural suburban transition area and it is clearly demonstrated by looking North towards the light source called Dundee! So once the clouds clear and there is no Moon you can look up and make out the Milky Way and with averted vision make out its shape. Even better use any binoculars and wonder and amaze yourself at the myriad of stars there are.

Planets. Currently on view are Jupiter and Saturn but they are quite low over the horizon only rising some 20 degrees and are close together rising in the SE and transiting south at about 19:00 GMT. Again, using binoculars will show the rings of Saturn but a telescope on a mount or tripod will afford you views of the belts of Jupiter and possibly the Great Red Spot (a turbulent gaseous storm many times the size of Earth that has been active for many hundreds of years).

Venus begins to shine brightly following the sun as it sets and will become higher and more easily seen as the winter progresses. **Don't be tempted to use binoculars whilst the Sun is still above the horizon. Never look at the Sun even without optics.**

The mighty hunter that is the constellation **Orion** will come into prominence as winter proceeds. Amongst its outside stars is the red giant Betelgeuse which along with Rigel, Bellatrix and Saiph make up the outline of this asterism. Look for the 3 stars of the belt in the middle and again with averted eyesight see if you can make out the diffuse nebula of the sword known as M42 – again easily seen through binoculars. When the Moon is absent try and count the stars that you can see with the naked eye within the aforementioned outer stars and that will confirm the amount of light pollution there is. Remember to let your sight adjust to the dark and you should be able, at Drumoig, to count around 16 – 20. Younger star gazers will fare better than the seniors!!



Saturn 2013.



M42. The Orion nebula from Drumoig 2017.



Jupiter from Drumoig September 2021

*John E. Bortle created the scale in 2001 – the scale ranges from Class 1, the darkest skies to Class 9, inner city skies.

The Comerton Place toadstool factory

You will remember from a previous newsletter that my granddaughter and I picked 232 mushrooms/toadstools from our front garden. We have now diversified and have a sprinkling of redcap toadstools to add to the collection!



The mushroom/toadstool field – see how many you can count!

Redcaps, *Amanita muscaria*, also known as fly agaric are poisonous but one really has to try very hard if you are contemplating suicide, a fatal dose requiring at least 15 redcaps. Despite their reputation the levels of muscarine are minute compared with other poisonous fungi. They are eaten in several parts of the world after being parboiled twice. They also have hallucinogenic properties (the *Muscaria* part of the scientific name) and have religious significance in some cultures. The term “fly” apparently originates from a learned treatise in Latin by Albertus Magnus in 1256. For those of you without fluency in Latin I have taken the liberty of translating it; it reads “it is called the fly mushroom because it is powdered in milk to kill flies”. Like a lot of things, one is left wondering “how on earth did they ever discover that?”.



I can't count myself as an expert on hallucinogenic mushrooms but I once had a brush with their properties (by accident, I must add). Many years ago, we went to a French restaurant in the mountains near Nice and I had a steak with some delicious mushrooms. Our children were keen to try them but they were so delicious that I ate them all myself. When we got back to our caravan, I suddenly found that I was shaking like a leaf and seemed incredibly alert. I was shaking so much that I couldn't even get a glass of water to my lips without spilling it! Served me right, didn't it?!

Magic Mushroom Martin.

As always, 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