

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 6 – JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022

January, on the whole, was milder than usual. There was a long dry spell from the 11th to the 30th although there was an abundance of dew on most days!

Activity started on the building sites with the erection of barriers (a Health & Safety requirement), a Sales Office and an activity which successive builders seem to excel at – moving earth in an apparently aimless fashion! It wasn't long before a succession of ready-mixed concrete lorries had laid 2 sets of foundations, but more of Kirkwood Homes later.

February was generally milder than usual and certainly drier in the first half but made up for it later in the month. A total of 55.5mm was recorded during February. We were subjected to storms Dudley, Eunice & Franklin which produced high winds but very little damage in our neck of the woods, in contrast to other parts of the country which had significant floods, electricity cuts and storm damage. The lowest temperature recorded (in Drumoig) this year has been -3.3C.

Contributions to this edition have been sufficient to make an index worthwhile!

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UPDATE ON STORM ARWEN

Alec Burden sent this accompanying photo and explanation:-

Apologies for my late thought that the attached photo could have been of some interest. Your excellent Newsletter contained a bit about tree damage following Storm Arwen (we were in Madeira and missed it, phew!). Recently I tried to cycle into Tentsmuir from Morton Lochs but couldn't because trees were blocking the tracks. I took this drone picture to figure out why and it shows just a part of the devastation to the forest.

If anyone has visited Mount St Helens, in America, the trees blasted down in straight lines will be a familiar sight.



It looks like Arwen should have been renamed Hurricane Arwen!

Those familiar with Morton Lochs will be able to get their bearings from the pictures below, one showing the old railway line with the car park, and the other is a view towards Shanwell Farm. The track heading to Fetterdale and Tentsmuir is somewhere under the trees.



In addition, we had quite a severe wind storm on the 29th January which initially was not quite bad enough to be credited with a name because it was meant to be a Danish affair. Belatedly it was given its Danish name – Storm Malik. It was enough to close the Tay Bridge for over 6 hours, where gusts of up to 89mph were recorded and 143mph was recorded on the top of Cairngorm! The following day we had a home-grown variety – Storm Corrie – which was not quite so severe.

THE SECOND GREAT TAY WHALE

On January 2nd we went for a walk with the family on Monifieth beach on a lovely sunny morning. Our daughter casually mentioned the remains of a whale carcass at the Barry Buddon end. Sure enough we came across a few bones which one could easily have missed although the same could not be said of the smell!



Whale jaw bone (or is it a vertebra?). Note handy 11-year-old granddaughter to provide scale.

We have no recollection of this event and although whales are rather rare in Drumoig, I felt it was worth looking into the story. At the time there were several articles in The Courier, starting in March 2018 when the whale beached itself and died. Angus Council were then faced with the problem of disposal which could be a hugely costly business. The whale was not small – it was a sperm whale, almost 40 feet long and weighing 35 tonnes. The pragmatic solution was to bury it on the beach which involved a mechanical digger making a deep trench while the tide was out and pushing the whale into the trench. It was then covered with sand and rocks. Inevitably the sea eventually washed some of the sand and rocks away and pieces of blubber and other whale parts began to surface.....accompanied by a rather intrusive smell!!

Dogs seemed to rather enjoy the novelty but their owners were not too thrilled. This side of the story “surfaced” in May 2019 when dog walkers reported being sick with the overwhelming smell. This resulted in a sign being erected which read “**HEALTH WARNING** - a section of decomposing whale carcass is exposed on the beach approx. 100m from this sign, going north towards Carnoustie. The carcass is exposed except at high tide. **Members of the public are advised to stay away from the whale carcass and also keep pets away.**”

Naturally, the sea, winds and tides have had their way with the sign which now lies flattened in the sand.



Beach sign with handy model for scale.

So why did the whale come to visit Monifieth? Apparently, sperm whales winter in the seas north of Scotland and off the northern coast of Norway. They feed on fish and squid and migrate to warmer waters in the spring to breed. Coming from the north they should turn right into the Atlantic to avoid Scotland and Ireland, whereas this whale turned left and ended up in the North Sea. For sperm whales the North Sea is too shallow and contains the wrong food mix so this specimen may have starved to death. There were numerous superficial cuts and scars which may have indicated that it had been in fights with other whales, but there were no signs of major trauma such as may have been caused by contact with ships etc. So, starvation and disorientation in the shallower waters of the North Sea seem to be the best explanation.

Acknowledgements:

The Courier

Google "Whale carcass on Monifieth Beach" for articles and videos.

JLW FOSTER & CO, CRAIGIE FARM.

Edward Foster runs a mainly arable enterprise at Craigie Farm growing Wheat, Barley, Oats & Oilseed Rape and some grazing land for horses.

Much of the autumn sown wheat, which is the predominant crop, goes for grain spirit production at major production facilities similar to Cameronbridge Distillery near Leven.

Craigie farm has its own grain drying and storage facilities enabling Edward to sell grain outwith the main harvest period

Barley, also autumn sown, mainly goes to animal feed compounders with some also grown for seed production. Spring sown malting barley for whisky/beer production has been grown on the farm in the past.

Spring sown Oats are to be in the rotation in the spring, these will potentially go for milling at the Quaker Oat (porridge) factory near Cupar.

Oilseed Rape (Yellow flowers in Spring) a member of the Brassica family, mainly goes for rapeseed oil production for use in food products. It has one of the highest yielding oils and has very small black seeds which are like poppy seeds and are 45% oil and the other is 55% high protein animal feed after processing. It can also be used for biodiesel and specialised industrial uses.

Edward also rents out land to local farmers for potato, carrot and soft fruit production

Much is spoken about diversification and the Foster family have certainly taken it on board. Examples are the Rynd Cafe, The Events Centre, Fitness Centre, Clay Pigeon shooting, Fitness equipment, Holiday rentals, Airbnb and Livery services.

As many residents will know Edward's father John was the owner of the land on which Drumoig Golf Course and houses now stand and was a founder member of Drumoig Golf Club. In a future edition it is hoped Edward will be able to supply some more of the history of the land and development.

IS IT A MOUSE OR A SQUIRREL?

Just before Christmas I came across a box of crockery in my garage intended for an auction. When I opened it up it was full of peanuts; the sort that you put in bird feeders. Further inspection of our garage revealed that the source of was a bag of peanuts for bird feeders which had been nibbled away. There were also a few pieces of fragmented newspaper (we had used newspaper to pack the crockery). My first thought was that it was mice what done it.....but how did tiny mice carry peanuts? – and none of the peanuts appeared to have been nibbled or eaten. Could it have been squirrels? After all they are renowned for “squirreling nuts away”; but how had they got in to the garage and also got out without us noticing them? The mystery remained until early in the new year when I decided to wash the car. I keep all the car cleaning sponges etc in a bucket and this includes a plastic bag with damp leathers for drying off the car. To my surprise there were more peanuts inside the bag, surrounded by a cocoon of mould. One of the leathers had been chewed. This is the mouldy mass of peanuts which I took out of the bag:-



And there it is – a mouse poking it's head out of the bottom of the congealed peanuts! Except.....when I opened the bundle of mould and peanuts.....there was no mouse to be found at all!!!

So, was it a mouse.....or a squirrel?

A TREECREEPER has been sighted in a Comerton Place garden. Unfortunately it didn't hang around long enough for a photo-shoot!

Treecreepers are small, distinctive, very active birds that (surprise, surprise) live in trees. They have a long, slender, downcurved bill. I struggled to get a decent image but the following are scans taken from the RSPB Handbook.



A tree creeper is 12.5cm long which is smaller than a great tit but larger than a wren. They feed on insects usually found in the cracks in bark and always move upwards on a tree in a spiral fashion before flying to the bottom and working their way up again. The upper surfaces are predominately brown while the breast is white. There are estimated to be over 200,000 pairs in the UK. The female incubates 5 – 6 eggs for about 14 days and the young are fed by both parents. They fly at 15 days old and are independent a week later. There may be 2 broods in the year, and they generally live in deciduous and coniferous woods.

Acknowledgement – The RSPB Handbook of British Birds

BITS AND BOBS FROM THE RSPB WEBSITE

Battling Robins

Ah the robin: that beautiful cute cuddly little bird seen in peaceful Christmas card scenes and the new Netflix animation [Robin Robin](#). But all isn't quite what it seems...

[Robins](#) are actually tough as nails with fire in their belly as well as on their chest. A good feeding patch is well worth defending, and that is exactly what they are doing when you hear them singing in mid-winter or see them chasing off anything that might have an eye on their worms.

Ed. I was trying to get a photo of a yellowhammer but the robin seemed to frighten him off, so here's a photo of the robin instead!



Wee Wrens

Another of our smallest birds, the wren, is easier to spot at this time of year as they'll be out frantically searching for insects to eat. The lack of insects and their small size makes them particularly vulnerable to cold weather, and in the most severe winters populations can dramatically decline.

Their scientific name is Troglodytidae which means 'cave dweller'. This reflects their habits of nesting and searching for food in gaps and crevices. Many defend territories where they know there will be a good supply of food but the differences are often put aside on an evening when they come together to roost to keep warm.

Frisky Foxes

It may be the middle of winter but foxes are turning up the heat. January is the peak of their breeding season and it is when they're at their most vocal, with their screeches and screams echoing through the blackness and scaring the living daylight out of those trying to sleep. They don't really mean any harm; they are just looking for love or fighting off rivals.

Once couples pair up, they spend a few weeks patrolling their territory and hunting together, forming a strong bond. The female also seeks out a place to give birth to her pups once spring arrives. These could be in purpose-built dens or equally underneath your garden shed!

DRUMOIG BIRD BOXES – an update by Christine Edwards

In the last newsletter I reported that from our 10 original wooden birdboxes, 3 had been damaged beyond repair and that others didn't have nests.

Therefore, my thanks go to Alec Burden, Craigie Hill for making and donating 4 new bird boxes. These boxes, shown below will provide a secure, warm, and dry environment for our woodland birds to nest in and have now been installed.



One of our bird boxes was lucky to avoid damage when a tree which was knocked down by Storm Arwen narrowly missed it.



NATIONAL NEST BOX WEEK – Mon 14 – Mon 21 February 2022



National Nest Box Week takes place every year between 14-21st February and is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. It is a celebratory period aimed at encouraging more people to help the birds by putting up nest boxes. Garden birds will be 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.

It is important that birds 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. However, if you

would like to help them, why not site a nest box in your garden or outdoor area, which will provide them with a clean, warm environment to lay their eggs and raise their chicks.

For more information click here: [National Nest Box Week 2022 | CJ Wildlife \(birdfood.co.uk\)](https://www.birdfood.co.uk/national-nest-box-week-2022/)



In December 2021 the Scottish Wildlife Trust announced that the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) project had secured initial funding for a two-year transitional phase in April 2022.

This 'booster' phase will enable the project to complete its aims and plan for the long-term future, leaving a legacy of sustainable and community-led red squirrel conservation across the south of Scotland. This follows on from successful projects in the North-East and Central Lowlands of Scotland. For further information click on the following link:

[News: 'Booster' project will protect Scotland's red squirrels for another two years – Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels \(scottishsquirrels.org.uk\)](https://www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk/news/booster-project-will-protect-scotland-s-red-squirrels-for-another-two-years/)

The SSRS continue to monitor squirrel numbers (Red and Grey) and would like to hear about your sightings. To report a Red Squirrel Sighting go to: https://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/?ssrs_sighting_add=1#BreadcrumbsAtTop

TAYPORT HEATH TO TENTSMUIR WALK - and the Larick Centre

If you would like to take a local walk, then a good place to go is Tayport. **(See attached map).** Starting at Tayport Heath, where there is a car park, you can look for birds in the estuary, including Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Curlew, Shelduck, Eider and, if you are lucky, a Little Egret.



From the heath cross the Lundin bridge, pass the tank traps and you can take a walk along the beach and into Tentsmuir Forest.



Once you have taken your walk you can return and relax at the Larick Centre café (see photo below) serving light meals, cakes and coffee and refreshments. The Larick Centre on Shanwell Road (some of you may have been there for your Covid Booster!) was built as a project by the Tayport Community Trust and as well as a café it is an activity and meeting place promoting and supporting health and fitness, local business, local employment, and tourism.



For more information and opening times click on the following link:
[About The Larick Centre - The Larick Centre \(tayportct.org.uk\)](https://tayportct.org.uk/about-the-larick-centre)

NESSIE MOVES TO DRUMOIG

I received this e-mail from Damian & Jenny Leddy from Comerton on 15th February:-

“My wife and I were walking on the 9th fairway this evening and spotted this chap playing in the water. Could it be Drumoig's very own Nessie? Sadly not, but it did appear to be a very relaxed and playful otter, so I thought I would send you a photo. Sorry for the low light quality of the photo but I think it adds to the "nessie-ness" (if that could be a word) of the photo.”



I agree about the “nessie-ness” – very atmospheric, isn’t it? As it happens, another resident had already alerted me to the presence of the otter but didn’t have a camera or phone on hand at the time.

The following day I received a further photo from Christine Kerr, taken in better light and showing the otter more clearly. I should add that all the sightings to date have been seen in the largest lake.



“Christine’s” otter

KIRKWOOD HOMES AND SKYLARKS.

It will not have escaped your notice that, at long last, there is some activity on the building front! Kirkwood Homes, who took over the building site at the turn of the year, have cracked

on with the building to some purpose and, at the time of writing, there are foundations laid for 3 houses and the start of the timber frame on one lot. Most residents will have mixed feelings about the development and the immediate disruption it will cause but it now seems that there is a finite end to the building which is scheduled to be complete by June 2023. Most of the lots have been reserved.



Building commences late February.



Drone view of the building site.



The building site with Dundee and the snow-capped Sidlaws in the background.

I am indebted to Alec Burden for these stunning drone pictures.

One of our eagle-eyed residents noticed that the building potentially encroached on a skylark nesting habitat on the grasslands to the north and south of Forgan Drive. Apparently, skylarks have thrived in this particular area. Having approached several agencies it became evident that this was a complicated situation! At the time of the original planning application skylarks were not a protected species but they are now. To cut a long story short, Kirkwood Homes have employed an environmental consultancy to make sure they are complying with requirements. This, of course, only applies to the building site but from one of Alec's drone pictures it looks as if there is sufficient space left in the grassland area to the south of Forgan Drive to keep the skylarks happy.



The skylark habitat looking north with the building site on the left.
The grassland area to the north of Forgan Drive is also part of the building development.

Skylarks are larger than a sparrow but smaller than a starling. They are a bird of open farmland and heath but their numbers have declined dramatically to 10% of their numbers of 30 years ago. The RSPB have researched this decline and believe it is mainly due to farming practices rather than pesticides. The former practice of planting cereals in the summer has been supplanted by winter cereals which are harvested in early summer, the skylarks breeding season.



Skylark with caterpillar (Wikipedia). Skylark ground nest (Wikipedia).

Skylarks, of course, are ground-nesting birds. Nesting begins in late March or April and 3 or 4 eggs may be laid in a clutch. Up to 3 broods may be raised in a season. The total breeding season may extend from late March through to September. At this time dogs should keep their owners on a leash when using the path over the grasslands (to the south of Forgan Drive) to prevent them running off and disturbing nests. The birds (and squirrels) are most at risk when they are actively feeding in the early morning light but are also vulnerable at other times. Apparently, cats are also potential predators but they do not tend to keep their owners on a leash!

I hope to have more details in the next newsletter on what can be done to protect our endangered species.

WINTER/SPRING NIGHT SKY 3 – by our resident astronomer, Steve Norrie.

As we head towards Spring, Orion is still dominating the night sky with Sirius but is moving westward and dipping as the season progresses. The constellation of Gemini is high in the sky with its familiar two-star pairing of Castor and Pollux. Pollux is brighter and more golden in colour and Castor is slightly fainter and white. Capella in Auriga still very high in the sky as is the Plough especially towards the early hours of the morning.

For those of you with telescopes then March/April are the months for seeing galaxies with the constellation of Virgo holding 20 viewable alone. Even if you don't have a specialised astro-camera your phone should be able to record images – try practising on the Moon first. The planets are hiding most of the evening, but Venus dominates the early morning sky before sunrise with Saturn and Jupiter now early morning risers too.

The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has successfully launched and has reached its "station" at the Lagrange 2 point – a point where gravitational influence from the Sun, Earth and Moon is neutral. From this position the telescope will have an unhindered view of space in its entirety and will look back towards the beginning of time. The compacted telescope has now unpacked itself and has begun the process of fine tuning the individual mirrors that make up the telescope. This and other calibration procedures will take a few more months but so far it has gone to plan. Just wait till we see the first picture!!

Clear skies.



Messier 51 Whirlpool Galaxy Ursa Major

Steve also sent these 2 pictures:-



Pink footed geese.



How cute is this red squirrel?!

FIFE COAST & COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

I have recently been sent an e-mail from the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. Their website is well worth a look – it can be reached on fifecountryside.org or fifecountryside.com. Of interest is the fact that they have placed 38 coastal safety markers on the Fife Coastal Path between Shell Bay and Kingsbarns in collaboration with Anstruther RNLI, Police Scotland & Waid Academy. They also note that the Fife Coastal Path between Leuchars and Wormit is still closed due to damage from Storm Arwen. They also suggest a number of walks.

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

