

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 8 – MAY/JUNE 2022



A rainbow after a heavy shower in June – courtesy of Dave Smith.

May saw a total of 40mm of rain, still slightly below average for the month. According to Wikipedia, the east of Scotland can have an average of 870mm (34.3 inches) per annum but, as we know, there are pockets of microclimates in our area. Wikipedia points out that Inchkeith in the Firth of Forth only receives an average of 550mm (21.7 inches) which is less than Barcelona!! Factor in climate change and we will see these figures changing.

June started off very dry with only 9.9mm up to the 26th June. Late rain boosted this to a total of 19.8mm, still well below average.

Based on Wikipedia’s information we should average 72.5mm per month (2.85 inches). In the first 6 months of this year, we have only had 168mm (6.6 inches), which equates to only 40% of the expected rainfall.

THE WEATHER ROUNDUP	1
OTTERS	1
THE RAMBLERS RETURN	1
A PIED WAGTAIL FLEDGLING	4
DEER	4
THE CRAIGIE HILL JUBILEE STREET PARTY	5
THE WORLD OF WOOD-EATING WASPS	7
SUMMER SKY – Steve Norrie	9
PROGRESS ON THE BUILDING SITE	11
GROUND NESTING BIRDS	13
PROPOSED OPEN GARDEN DAY	13
PEACEHILL FARM – Rob Pirie	13

OTTERS. There have been further sightings of an otter in the larger pond. Duncan McDougall took a short video on his phone which showed the otter lolling across the fairway between the 2 main ponds – so it is still around!

THE RAMBLERS RETURN.

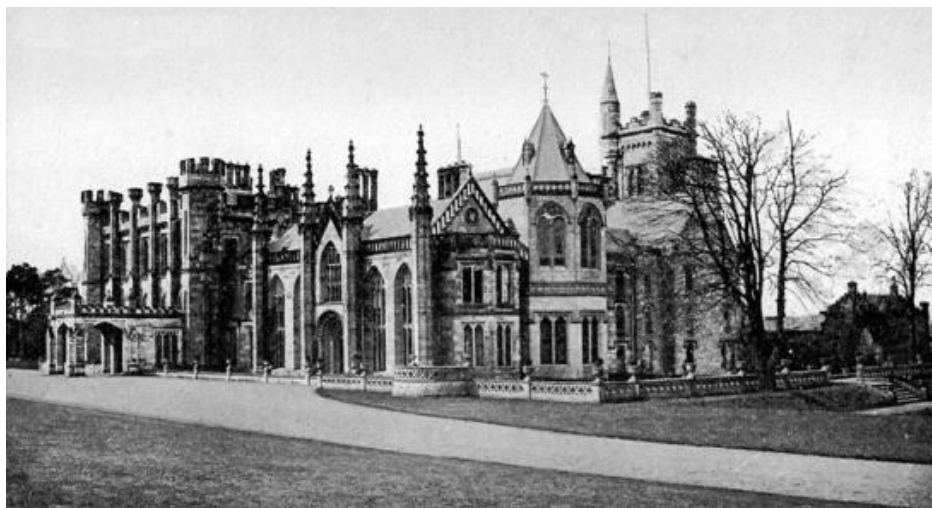
No, this is not the name of a TV pub – it marked the return of the Drumoig Ramblers Group to activity after the long lay-off following the Covid pandemic.

Eight intrepid ramblers convened at Fisher & Donaldson's in Cupar on Tuesday 10th May to fortify ourselves with caffeine before the exercise ahead – my goodness, we had to walk 3 ½ miles!



Able led by expedition leader, Alan Davidson, we set off from Springfield to visit the ruins of Crawford Priory – never heard of it? Neither had anyone else! It turned out to be an intriguing visit with glimpses of lost splendours and ages past.

Crawford Priory was an impressive Gothic mansion built from 1809 onwards by Lady Mary Crawford, heiress to the Lindsay-Crawford estates. She never married but she was of a religious turn of mind hence the design being reminiscent of a Priory (on a grand scale).



Crawford Priory in its heyday.

The Priory is now a sad but impressive ruin but the massive stables have been preserved as extensive private properties giving a glimpse of the scale of the original vision.



The coach-house facade.



The ruined Priory.

A convivial lunch was had in “Muddy Boots” - well, our boots may have been slightly muddy but, for the uninitiated, I’m referring to the farm shop at Balmalcolm.

An expedition of this sort is not without its dangers but I’m pleased to say that our intrepid band were not daunted and arrived home unscathed.



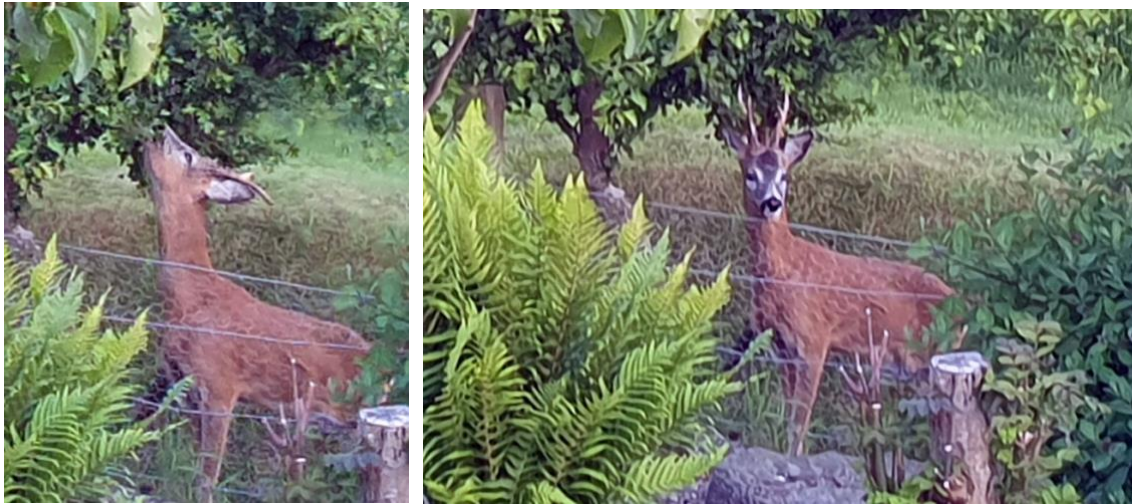
Well done, Alan. That'll be a hard act to follow!

A PIED WAGTAIL FLEDGLING was found by the builders in the middle of one of their plots in late May. They contacted Christine Kerr of Pickletillem Avenue who, in turn, contacted the SSPCA. They responded promptly, identified it as a pied wagtail, and then took it to a lady who specialises in hand rearing birds. So, hopefully, a happy ending.



Luckily, Christine had the foresight to take a few pictures!

DEER are a relatively common sighting around Drumoig but they are easily startled and often difficult to photograph. Here are 2 pictures from Dave Smith.



These are Roe deer and are a rusty brown in the summer months, turning grey, pale brown or sometimes black in the winter. The small antlers with three prongs on males are known as tines. They almost became extinct in the UK in the 1800's due to forest clearance and over-hunting, but survived in Scotland. They were re-introduced in England and are now abundant. Here are a few Roe deer facts:-

- Habitat: prefer woodland but also spend time in open fields.
- They are distributed throughout the British Isles.
- Generally solitary animals but tend to group together in winter. They tend to venture into open space at night.
- They eat young tree shoots, brambles, ivy, heather, and bilberries.
- They breed mid-July to mid-August.
- They live up to 10 years, weigh up to 25KG and reach a height of 75cm.

THE CRAIGIE HILL STREET JUBILEE PARTY.

Residents of Craigie Hill got their act together and organised a street party to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Apart from the bunting, the Union Jack hats, the cakes, and the booze, there were other attractions such as croquet, street music and the latest entrants to Masterchef: the barbeque. But pictures are better than a thousand words (you'll be pleased to know), so here are a few photos of the event:-





The Masterchefs prepare to spring into action



A rival patriotic display in Comerton Place.

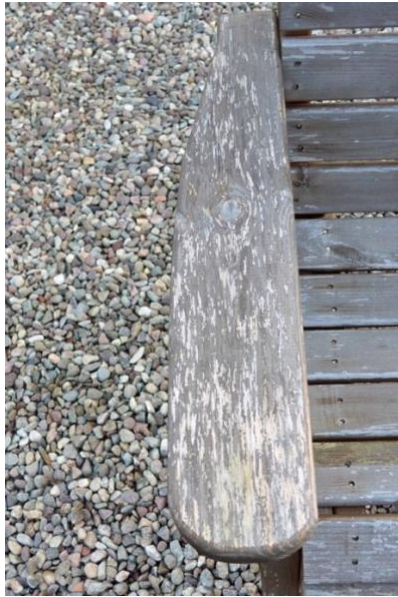
THE WORLD OF WOOD-EATING WASPS.

You may remember that last year (newsletter number 3) we had a bunch of wasps determined to eat our garden furniture. It's the cellulose they're after, of course, which they use to make their nests.



The wood-eating wasp.

The winter months have enabled me to fix the problem. Our garden benches were duly sanded down and painted with Dulux Exterior Wood Paint.



Wasp eaten bench



Painted

Problem solved.....unless.....unless.....wasps like Dulux Exterior Wood Paint!!

During the recent winds we noticed a few wispy paper balls blowing around in the back yard. On closer inspection they turned out to be wasp nests. They are beautifully made of concentric rings of wasp-masticated cellulose. Many years ago, in our previous house, we noticed a wasp's nest in the attic eaves. This was a considerably bigger affair measuring roughly 50 cm in diameter and was removed by the Council Pest Control Officer (thank goodness). The interior was an architectural wonder with an intricate honeycomb structure – the size of the nest obviously depends upon the species of wasp.



Wasp nests – Drumoig style.

SUMMER SKY – Steve Norrie

Final commissioning of the JWST (James Webb Space Telescope) is underway and some of the first test partial images prove how much greater detail and focus this telescope can achieve... the first stunning full image yet to come!

If you are a very early bird and the skies are clear you should see the major planets rising in the eastern horizon with Venus and Jupiter shining brightly. The planets are now rising higher in the sky than in previous years so viewing through a telescope will be much easier. Otherwise, due to the northern latitude of Drumoig, most summer evenings are too bright for star gazing other than the brightest stars but do continue to look out for the noctilucent clouds high up in the upper atmosphere.

The Moon of course is still worth a look and best viewed when it is half full as the craters will show best with some shadow to emphasise a 3-d view. A full Moon, although impressive, is washed out and apart from the southern crater of Tycho all a bit flat. It is hard to believe that it is nearly 53 years since man first stepped onto the Moon. Did you know that by searching on line you will find images taken by the Lunar Orbiter that show the landing sites of all the Apollo missions with some amazing detail including the tracks of the lunar rovers? However, it has not found Elvis!

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Steve also sent me a series of stunning photos which follow, accompanied by a short explanation where necessary.



Greenfinch.



Buzzard



Caddis Fly



Pond skipper

There are over 14,500 species of Caddis fly and they have aquatic larvae (seen on the left) but terrestrial adults.

Ever wanted to walk on water? Well, Pond Skippers or Skaters can do that. There are 9 species in the UK and they feed on smaller insects. They have water repellent hairs on the bottom of

their feet which enables them to walk on water. Both the above 2 pictures are the result of Steve “re-wilding” his garden. The one above is probably the Common Pond Skater. You may remember from newsletter 7 that Swifts were due to return after their epic journey but they are a species in decline. Steve has finally spotted one and photographed it against a stunning sunset.



Where is it?



Right in the middle!

The next photograph of a dragonfly gets my award for the DWF photo of the year!



And finally, Steve has a conundrum for all you golfers – is it a golf ball or a puff ball?



Many thanks to Steve for a great set of photos.

PROGRESS ON THE BUILDING SITE.

The new building site is progressing apace as the first 2 houses are now ready for occupancy. Alec Burden has been busy with his drone and has provided some excellent aerial shots.



Overview of the 2 sites.



14 houses have been started.



Lower angle view.



Ground level view with crane in action.

GROUND NESTING BIRDS.



You may have noticed that four signs warning of ground nesting birds in the grassland south of Forgan drive have appeared recently. After an approach by the DRA Committee the Drumoig Golf Hotel arranged for the signs to be made and have kindly met the cost of the signs. They were put up at the end of last week at the main entry points to the paths through the area. Walkers are urged to keep to the pathways and keep pets under control when walking in the area.

PROPOSED OPEN GARDEN DAY.

So far there has been no response to my suggestion of an Open Garden Day! Either this is not such a brilliant idea or people have forgotten about it! My proposal was to have an open day on Sunday, 28th August from 11am to 3pm. It does not need to be a show garden so anything

between a neat garden and a wilderness would be of interest. Please let me know by the 1st August and I'll make the necessary arrangements – at kaymarthep1@aol.com

PEACEHILL FARMING COMPANY, PEACEHILL, WORMIT – Rob Pirie

A few years ago, a number of residents visited Peacehill Farm and were given a conducted tour of the recently installed anaerobic digesters by Peter Forster. In my quest to inform Drumoig Residents on farming practices and crops grown I have revisited Peacehill and had an in-depth discussion with Ross Forster, Peter's son who runs the whole enterprise.

Peacehill, Hayston and Kilmany are all farmed by the Farming company and cover approximately 2,500 acres. There is a spread of both cereals and vegetable crops as well as a large chicken (broiler) production facility alongside the anaerobic digesters.

On the vegetable side Ross grows around 250 acres of Cauliflowers, 270 acres of Broccoli and 200 acres of Potatoes. There is also about 300 acres of Sugar Beet which is used in the digester. The Cauliflower and Broccoli are all graded on site and marketed through East Coast Growers, a locally based marketing group. The Potatoes are marketed through the Scottish Potato Cooperative which is based in Newport. Invariably all the produce will end up on the shelves of the large supermarkets.

On the cereals side the produce from 200 acres of wheat (after milling) is used internally to feed the chickens. The 300 acres of barley is sold to animal feed producers similar to the ABN on the outskirts of Cupar. The largest cereal crop grown is 650 acres of Rye which is grown for inclusion in the digester. A further 650 acres is grown on contract on local farms. Harvesting of the Rye will commence next week, the crop is cut green by large forage harvesters and the whole crop is then stored in vast clamps at Peacehill. An estimated 24,000 tonnes will be harvested during July.

On site at Peacehill are a number of large broiler chicken sheds which produce some 350,000 broilers per annum. They are fed on home produced wheat and the waste chicken manure is all fed into the digesters. The chicken sheds are all heated by four wood-chip biomass boilers and electricity for all the other activities on the farm is harvested from solar panels on their roofs.

The chickens go through the only preparation and packing site in Scotland at Coupar Angus and again end up on the shelves of the large supermarkets.

Ross emphasized the number of assurance schemes he has to adhere too, whether it be vegetables, cereals or livestock - it all takes time but rest assured (forgive the pun) it means that all produce is grown, stored and packed to the highest standard.

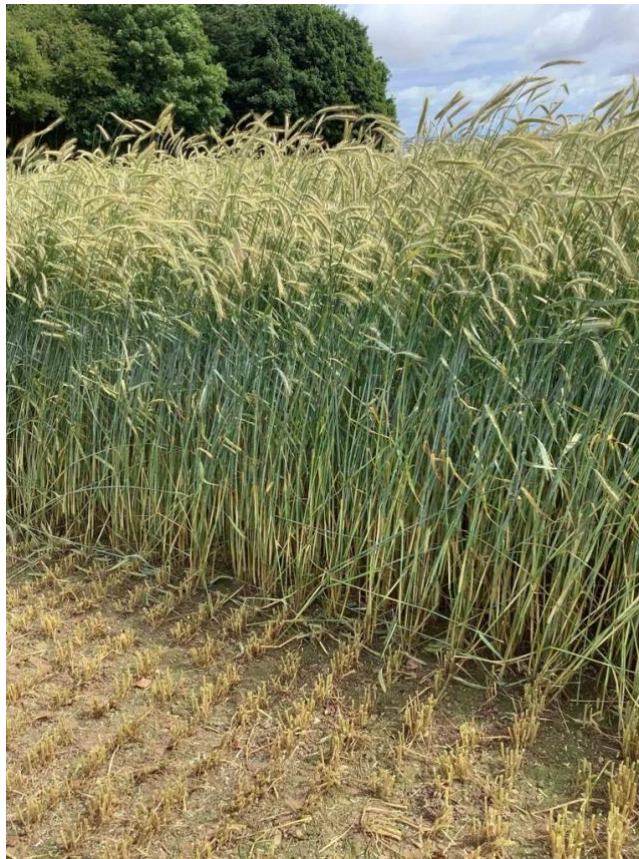
Finally, the Anaerobic Digesters. These are fed, as mentioned above with Rye, Sugar beet and Chicken manure and produce methane gas 24/7 throughout the year. In the summer months when demand is not at its peak, they produce sufficient gas to supply the requirements from Tayport to Perth. The gas is fed directly into the mains, sadly there is not a branch pipeline to Drumoig!

The residue from the digesters is an excellent fertiliser, both in a liquid and solid form which

means Ross has cut his usage of artificial fertiliser by more than 75%.

Peacehill Farming Company employ 20 full time staff and around 60 Eastern European part time staff.

My thanks go to Ross Forster who gave up his valuable time at a very busy time of year to pass on all the very interesting information mentioned above. Due to pressure of work and the commencement of the Rye harvest he has been unable to check this article so any errors or omissions are mine!



The rye harvest.



Loading the rye.

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Peter's father, "Binks", was the original family farmer at Peacehill but the business expanded considerably under Peter and Ross's care. As a matter of interest, Peter has the honour of being the captain of the R & A in the 150th year of the Open Championship. – Editor.

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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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