

DRUMOIG WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 9 – JULY/AUGUST 2022

The weather roundup is yet again emphasising the dramatic drop in rainfall in our area. July saw a measly 23mm, well below the 75mm we should be averaging. Along with record breaking heat waves, the ground and plants are drying up dramatically – we recorded a record 32C in our front garden which coincided with the official reading from Leuchars on the same day. Elsewhere in the country even higher temperatures were recorded. The lake levels on the golf course have also dropped and the reed beds have dried up.



Dried reed beds by the 18th tee



dried earth near one of the tees

July promised to be much of the same with high temperatures in the high 20's and sparse rainfall until the 15th when we had 11.4mm. Sporadic showers for the rest of the month topped up to a total of 45mm, still well below the projected average of 75mm.

We have a varied selection of topics this July & August which might be labelled “Moth Months”, along with our regular contributors Christine Edwards, Rob Pirie & Steve Norrie.

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My idea of a garden open day was spectacularly unsuccessful – exactly zero interest!! It may be worth trying again next year when we will have a good number of new residents eager to lick their gardens in to shape and looking for brilliant ideas!

However, in a way, we had a garden open day in that Drop in For a Drink (DIFAD) was cancelled by the hotel on the 12th August due to an excessive influx of golfers and we (Martin & Kay) opened up our rear garden. Instead of Buy your own drink (BYOD) it was Bring your own! It was a very convivial evening with about 20 attending.



DIFAD Alfresco

SOME INTERESTING PHOTOS sent by Andrew Thomson.

Andrew Thomson from Craigie Hill sent these interesting photos which just shows what interesting wildlife we have around us!

Jay fledgling.

Andrew spotted this young Jay sitting on a log in Morendy Woods, just across the road from Drumoig. Jays are essentially woodland birds which live in both deciduous and conifer forests, woods or copses. They are widespread in Britain apart from the north of Scotland. There are thought to be about 160,000 pairs in the UK and Andrew was lucky to spot this one as they tend to be a secretive type of bird. I don't think it can have been long out of the nest as it just sat there and allowed Andrew to photograph it!



Woolly (bear) caterpillar also known as the Garden Tiger Moth.



This impressive caterpillar was spotted on the 11th tee! The garden tiger caterpillar is a furry black and orange caterpillar with long feathery spines that resemble a miniature porcupine. As can be seen it has an orange head with a light copper-coloured band along the side. The body is basically black but the spines turn white towards the tip. The spines are a protection against predators. They are also sometimes toxic to predators depending on the plants they feed on from which they absorb toxins e.g. foxglove (deadly nightshade). They grow to a length of 6cm (2.4 inches). They are widespread throughout North America and Europe.



The garden tiger moth has a wingspan of 45 – 65 mms. There are many colour and pattern variants. It has been estimated that there could be as many as 500 different variants. The moths prefer a wild habitat from grasslands to forests and also prefer a cooler climate.

Of course, blokes of my vintage think of aeroplanes when you hear the word “Tiger Moth”. My experience took place on the 28th July 1959 as an air cadet (in the school Combined Cadet Force).

The De Havilland Tiger Moth was the RAF basic trainer from the 1930’s to the early 1950’s and was widely used worldwide, and was also very popular with flying clubs. 8,866 were produced between 1931 and 1945. The “Tiger” was only one of a family of related aircraft all named after varieties of moth; thus, we have the Fox, Gipsy, Leopard, Hornet, Puss, and Hawk Moths. Geoffrey De Havilland, the main designer was obviously “into moths”; some variants had folding wings “just like the real thing” as he pointed out! The Tiger Moth also had slightly swept back wings – an unusual feature for the time.



Harlequin Ladybird.



Andrew thought this was a Japanese ladybird but I think it may be a Harlequin ladybird but that may be the same thing! It was spotted on a fence post bordering Craigie Hill and the 11th tee. Harlequins (*Harmonia axyridis*) only became established in the UK in 2004 and are now widespread. They originated from Japan and were introduced as a biological control agent around the world to control aphids. It is difficult to be certain with ladybirds as there are over 40 native species which have a great variety of colour forms. For example, Harlequins can be black with 2 red spots or orange with 18 black spots!! The eggs are laid in

clusters on leaves and are 1 – 2 mm across but very similar to other ladybird eggs. The attempt to use them as an aphid control may well have back-fired as, when they run out of aphids, they eat other insects, eggs and larvae and can also be cannibalistic!

Toads.

This toad was spotted between the 11th green and the 12th tee. Toads are quite widespread in Drumoig and are probably centred on the wet areas such as the lakes, reed beds and garden ponds. They are probably high on the menu for our visiting otter. I have seen them in my garden, usually in winter, when I have found them under a pile of leaves, where they were hibernating: you get quite a shock when they move!!



Hedgehogs.

This chap is not exactly a Drumoig native – he was spotted outside the Spar/Post Office in Leuchars – probably going for his pint of milk!!



CEREAL IDENTIFICATION, INCLUDING CROP USAGE AND STATISTICS – provided by our own farming correspondent, Rob Pirie. Rob is highlighting crops which may be grown in the fields around us.

BARLEY (Winter & Spring)

Spring Barley (spring sown) is Scotland's main cereal crop. The main market for spring barley is malting; Malt is produced from the crop to supply the Scotch Whisky Distilling Industry and to a lesser extent Beer Brewers. There are two large malting plants locally, Boortmalt, near Montrose and Bairds Malt in Arbroath. Malting barley accounts for approx. 60% (895 thousand metric tonnes) (k/mt) of the total crop of about 1.5 million tonnes (average yield of 2021 crop 5.8 tonnes per hectare) (t/ha). The remainder is mainly used for animal feed either on farm or by animal feed compounders similar to ABN at Cupar.

Winter Barley (autumn sown) is generally the first crop harvested and virtually all goes for animal feed. Approx 300k/mt is produced in Scotland (average yield of 2021 crop 7.7t/ha).



Barley field crop



Barley ears



Barley grain

WHEAT (Autumn sown)

Around 900k/mt of soft wheat (low protein) is grown in Scotland. There are two main markets for the crop - Grain spirit production in plants similar to Cameronbridge Distillery at Leven and animal feed, either on farm or by animal feed compounders (average yield of 2021 crop 8.5t/ha). Very little hard wheat (high protein) for flour milling (bread making) is grown north of the Border due to the climate. There is one local flour miller in Kirkcaldy, Carrs Milling, formally Robert Hutchisons where wheat is normally shipped in from England.



Wheat field crop



Wheat ears



Wheat grain

OATS (mainly spring sown)

In the days of true “horse power” oats were the main crop, mainly used to feed the horses, with mechanisation the crop went into decline but is now rapidly expanding again due to popularity as a health food including oatmilk, porridge and oatmeal etc. Much of the crop grown locally is used for porridge production at the Quaker factory near Cupar. Around 189k/mt are grown in Scotland (average yield of 2021 crop 5.6t/ha).



Oat field crop



Oat ears or panicles



Oat grains

OILSEED RAPE (late summer sown)

Although not a cereal (part of the Brassica family), Oilseed Rape is a very recognisable crop with its bright yellow flowers in Spring. Around 127k/mt is grown throughout Scotland (average yield of 2021 crop 3.8t/ha). The small black seeds produced are crushed to release the oil within; this is used in many areas of food production and cosmetics as well as some other specialised markets. The residue after crushing, rape meal, is used by animal feed compounders.



Oilseed rape field crop



Oilseed rape pods



Oilseed rape seeds

One Hectare = 1000square metres or 2.47 Acres

A SWALLOW-TAILED MOTH was spotted by Michael Duncan in mid-July and he captured it in a jam jar and then captured it on camera – here it is:-



Although the swallow-tailed moth is common across most of Europe it usually only flies at night in June & July so is not often noticed. Although it is mainly nocturnal it is attracted to light so may congregate about light bulbs in large numbers. It is larger than most moths with a wingspan of 50 – 62mm. The brown larva (caterpillar) resembles a twig and feeds on a variety of trees and shrubs such as elder, hawthorn, honeysuckle and ivy.

A HUMMING-BIRD HAWKMOTH was spotted by Jeanie Duncan on the 5th July. They really are a spectacular moth – I saw one in the garden at our former house in Newport many years ago. Jeanie managed to get a photo which is not an easy thing to do as the wings beat at the rate of 80 beats **per second**!! If you have a professional camera with top-end shutter speeds you may get a picture like this archive photo obtained from the internet!



Jeanie's photo



Archive photo of Humming-bird moth

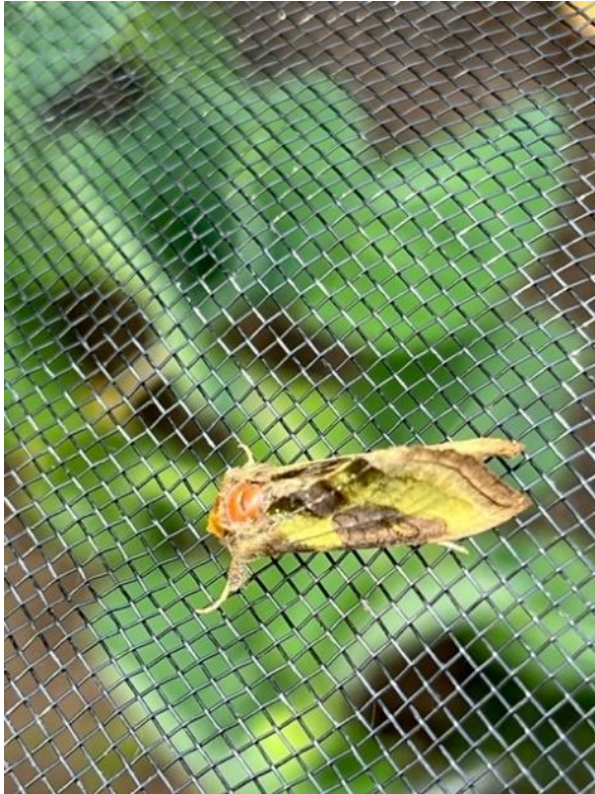
THE MOTHS & CATERPILLARS OF CRAIGIE HILL by Christine Edwards.

These moths and caterpillar were photographed by Christine Edwards in her garden at Craigie Hill



Willow Beauty (*Peribatodes rhomboidaria*)

Commonly distributed throughout Britain, these moths mostly fly in July and August and have a wingspan of 34-48 mm. They rest during the day and feed on flowers such as Creeping Thistle and Ragwort at night.



Burnished Brass (*Diachrysia chrysitis*)

Commonly distributed throughout Britain, these moths fly between June and September. It has a spectacular brassy, metallic sheen on the forewings, the wingspan is 32-38mm. The adults feed at dusk on the flowers of Honeysuckle, Buddleias and Red Valerian.



Large Yellow Underwing (*Noctua pronuba*)

Common and widespread throughout Britain, Ireland and the Channel Islands, they can be found from August to early spring, and have a wingspan of 42-52mm. They feed at night on a range of herbaceous plants and hide during the day. When they open their wings, it reveals its yellow underwings.



Grey Dagger Caterpillar (*Acronicta psi*)

The colourful larva is marked with red and yellow and has a tall 'hump' on the back, close to the head, which is covered in hairs.

It turns into this lovely moth named after the dagger like markings (photo courtesy of Butterfly Conservation). This flies between June and August and has a wingspan of 30-40mm. Although common in the rest of Britain it is scarcer in Scotland.



For more information on moths and help with identification go to [Home page | Butterfly Conservation \(butterfly-conservation.org\)](http://Home page | Butterfly Conservation (butterfly-conservation.org)) or UKMoths | Guide to the moths of Great Britain and Ireland

WEED OF THE MONTH – LAMBSQUARTERS

Ian Wilson contacted Kirkwood Homes about the spread of a weed on the topsoil used alongside the house at 15, Picklettillem and also in the new turf nursery area behind the houses at the top of Craigie Hill. Kirkwood Homes thanked Ian for drawing it to their attention. Ian had provisionally identified the weed as “Lambsquarters” or *Chenodium Album*.



“Lambsquarters” adjacent to 15 Pickletillems The turf nursery riddled with “Lambsquarters”

To my mind there are several intriguing facets to this story. The first is that the affected sites don't seem to have any other weeds and Lambsquarters is totally dominant. The “Plantnet” app on my phone confirmed Ian's diagnosis of “Lambsquarters” or *Chenopodium Album*. The following photograph shows it in close-up and also confirmed that I had several prime examples in my own garden!



Close up of *Chenopodium Album*

According to that fount of all knowledge, the internet, it is a common roadside and field plant. The genus name, *Chenopodium*, means “goose foot” in Greek, referring to the shape of the leaves. It is apparently a favourite with foragers as its leaves taste like a mild version of spinach. The story does not stop there!

- In the Punjab regions of India & Pakistan it is grown as an agricultural crop as the leaves are exceptionally high in Vitamins A & C, as well as calcium, iron & protein.
- There are lambsquarters recipes in foraging cookbooks.
- You will be delighted to know that it is easily prepared and can be eaten raw, steamed, boiled or blanched.
- The seeds serve as a powerful flour additive, porridge ingredient or bread enhancer.
- The nutrient-packed seeds also provide handy nourishment for birds.

- You may not be surprised to hear that it has medicinal properties – a poultice from simmered leaves is used (by whom?!!) to alleviate achy or swollen joints and the water left from simmering the leaves can be used as a mouthwash for toothache.
- Sadly it is totally impotent against President Putin, inflation and the price of oil....but you can't have everything!

A week or two later it was obvious that someone had sprayed the weeds beside the property at 15 Pickletilleme but the turf nursery had many further layers of topsoil deposited so it was impossible to know if the weeds had been treated beforehand.

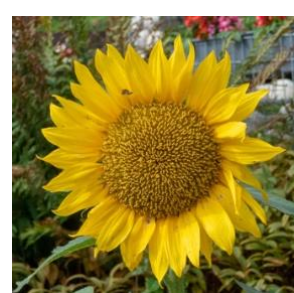


The dying Lambsquarters adjacent to No. 15. The turf nursery with new topsoil.

I'm sure you're all dying to know the next exciting development in the Lambsquarters Saga – if anything comes to light, I'll let you know!

THE SUNFLOWER.

Last year we had a sunflower in our garden. We have another one this year and I was able to shoot a sequence of its development, largely shot on consecutive days. It's not as big as last years but still impressive with webs, flies, bees and wasps inhabiting it.



LATE SUMMER SKY – by Steve Norrie

The **JWST** is now operational having completed around three hundred stages to get to full deployment and despite a few micrometeoroid hits is sending back some impressive images. Its cameras are looking back in time to image new galaxies that formed within 200-300 million years after the big bang – a status that has never been reached before.



This is an image of the **Cartwheel Galaxy** which is slowly regaining its shape and structure after a nearby galaxy passed through it! The James Webb Space Telescope has peered into the chaos of the Cartwheel Galaxy, revealing further details about star formation and the galaxy's central black hole. JWST's powerful infrared gaze produced this detailed image of the Cartwheel and two smaller companion galaxies against a backdrop of countless other galaxies.

Meanwhile up in the skies, when you can see them, the summer triangle is slowly sinking to the west and the chance of seeing NLC virtually gone for this season. Once properly dark look straight up and with averted vision, once your eyes have dark adapted, you will see the Milky Way – our very own Galaxy. Cygnus the Swan is the almost straight up constellation which within lie numerous nebulous targets for astrophotographers. Just use a pair of binoculars and be amazed at the number of stars you will see.

Planets are now coming into view with the brightest of them all, Jupiter, reaching a good altitude at transit south with Saturn, sadly a lower and dimmer object but still worth a look at through the telescope or binoculars. Mars is likewise creeping up in altitude and as it approaches opposition its apparent size is increasing and by November will be an impressive red object in the night sky.

The JWST has also imaged targets closer to home – namely Jupiter using its near-infra red camera. Now compare it to my image from the back garden in August!



JWST image.



Steve's image in August.

I recently saw that the cost of building the JWST and sending it into space was \$10bn!! – Ed.

Steve also contributed a few photos:-





This is wild carrot, also known as Queen Anne's Lace. It is a dainty, frothy wildflower with a single red bloom in its centre and is a beautiful free gift from nature. There are several stories as to how it came by its name – most revolve around James 1 consort, Queen Anne, who is said to have pricked her finger and stained some lace with a drop of blood. It grows to about 3-4 feet with attractive flower heads and decorative seed heads for Autumn. In Scotland it mainly occurs on the coast.....and Steve Norrie's garden!

Unlike cultivated carrots, the wild carrot's root is tough and not to be recommended!

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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