

KINGHORN BIODIVERSITY MONTHLY REPORT – APRIL 2024 by Robert Mill



Common Alder-fly (*Sialis lutaria*), 22 April 2024. See text, p. 3. Photo Robert Mill.

April 2024 in our area was a month of two halves: a dull and very wet, often windy, first half, then a dry and often sunny spell, but often with a chilling wind off the North Sea, in the second half. From 5th-6th, Storm Kathleen, the eleventh named storm of the 2023/4 storm season, brought heavy rain and wind to the whole of the UK (Met Office, 2024a, b). At the Kinghorn Ecology Centre's rain gauge, 103.4 mm of rainfall was collected during the month, 100.6 mm of which (97.3%) fell in the first 15 days and 66.2 mm (64%) in just the first five; by contrast, only 2.8 mm fell in the second half (SEPA, 2024), though the ground remained saturated. This is not surprising, given that the total April rainfall this year was approximately 3.5 times the April average for the site, just 29.8 mm. In common with most of southern, eastern, north-eastern and northern Scotland, as well as all of England and Wales, our area had below-average sunshine during April. Maximum temperatures in our area were above average on 6th-8th, 10th-13th, 18th, 22nd-24th and 30th April and average or below on 1st-5th, 9th, 14th-17th, 19th-21st, and 25th-29th (Met Office, 2024b).

I visited the Loch seven times in April (on 4th, 11th, 17th, 19th, 22nd, 23rd and 26th) while Paul Williams recorded birds and sometimes also butterflies and mammals on 4th, 8th, 16th, 18th, 25th and 26th. As can be seen, occasionally we both went on the same day but my visits were always in the afternoon to early evening whereas his were in the morning or early afternoon. There were also records of birds made on 19th by Robert Cousins and on 28th by Hawk Gula (both eBird) as well as a few observations by others.

Six more species were added to the Loch's list during April. They comprised two hoverflies, one unidentified chironomid midge (much smaller than *Chironomus plumosus*, previously recorded, and also not matching any species listed by Edwards, 1985), and three more flowering plants. As well as these, when reading another back issue of the *Fife Bird Report*, I unearthed four 2008 records of **Honey Buzzards** on passage through the Kinghorn area, part of a major passage of the species in the third week of September that year; they included one seen flying south over the Loch on 21 September 2008 by Keith Ballantyne (Fife Bird Club, 2010). This and my own six new Loch records brought the cumulative total up from 1,678 (31 March) to **1,685** on 30 April.

AROUND THE LOCH Birds: 59 bird species were recorded on and around Kinghorn Loch during April, mainly by Paul Williams (PW) and myself but also by a few others: Richard Cousins (RC) on 19th (eBird), Hawk Gula (HG) on 28th (eBird) and Nigel Voaden (NV) on 18th (eBird). April's only passage migrant was a **Common Sandpiper** that made a two-day stopover at the Loch and was seen on 18th (NV) and 19th (RC). Several other summer migrants arrived to settle at the Loch. The number of **Chiffchaffs** increased slightly although most had arrived



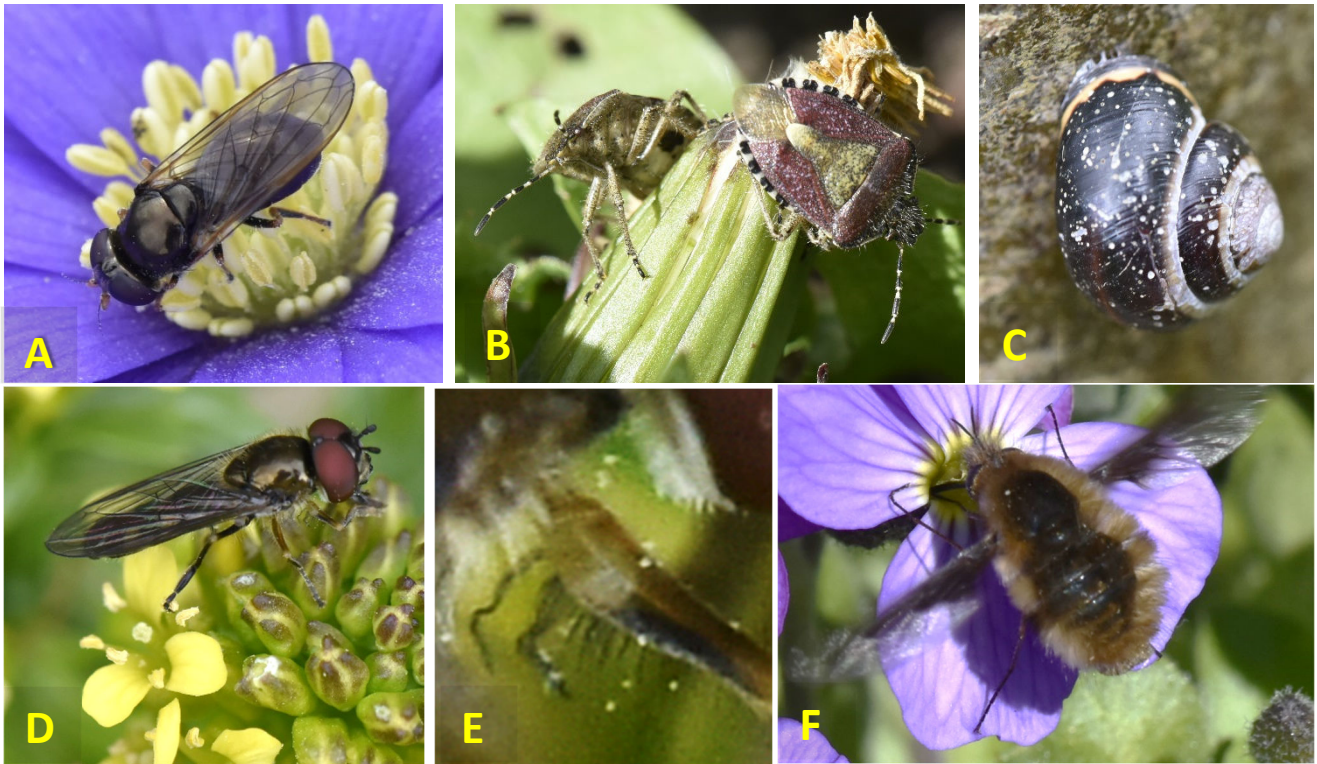
One of two Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*) on jetty edge, 4th.
Photo Robert Mill.

by the end of March. **Willow Warblers** arrived from 16th (PW), with several scattered about the lochsides by the month's end. The first **Blackcap** was noted on 7th (NV). Ten **Swallows** were also seen that day by Nigel, also the first record this year. **Sand Martins** made their first Loch visit a few days later on 11th; numbers were usually quite small but on 18th Paul Williams was fortunate to see a huge number that in his estimation was over 100 and nearer to 200. As is typical, **House Martins** were the last to be seen (26th, PW). Apart from Sand Martins, whose first sighting at the Loch was about a week later than last year, all these first-sighting dates were a few days earlier than in 2023. A **Goldeneye** was present on 22nd, the month's only record. A drake **Red-breasted Merganser** was present from 23rd-26th at least and was seen by both

myself and PW; as I write, it was also there in early May but there was no sign in April of the two females that were on the Loch in March. A few **Tufted Ducks** were on the Loch all month although numbers dwindled from about 5 in the first half to only two at the end of April. **Little Grebe (Dabchick)** numbers also decreased as the month progressed but by the end there were four **Great Crested Grebes**, with courtship and nest building taking place. **Grey Heron** was only recorded once in April (8th, PW) but a single **Cormorant** took up residence from 18th, favouring the raft near the west end of the jetty. **Curlew** was recorded on four occasions, with 12 seen on 8th by PW. **Black-headed Gulls** were away at breeding-grounds all month and other gull numbers were much lower than over winter, although a single **Great Black-backed Gull** was seen twice, on 17th by myself and on 28th by Hawk Gula. **Buzzards** were seen on four days and **Kestrel** on three. **Skylarks** were often heard singing and sometimes seen. There were several records of **Mistle Thrush** in the second half of April, with two noted on 22nd by PW. **Goldcrest** was recorded only on 8th, by PW. Hawk Gula saw 15 **House Sparrows** on 28th, an unusually high number for the Loch assuming they were correctly identified; most Loch sparrow records relate to **Tree Sparrows**, which were reported by various observers on seven occasions throughout April, although one or two House Sparrows are sometimes present. Paul Williams saw a **Meadow Pipit** on 16th and pairs of both **Grey** and **Pied Wagtail** were seen on several dates. Both **Yellowhammer** (4th) and **Reed Bunting** (a male and a female on 8th) were seen by Paul Williams. The full list of birds recorded at the Loch during April 2024, in systematic rather than alphabetical order as in previous reports, is: *Pheasant, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Farmyard geese hybrids, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Dabchick (Little Grebe), Great Crested Grebe, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Moorhen, Coot, Grey Heron, Cormorant, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Buzzard, Kingfisher, Kestrel, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, House Martin, Swallow, Sand Martin, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Wren, Starling, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Dunnock, Robin, Goldcrest, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Meadow Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting.*

Mammals, amphibians and fish: Paul Williams saw the remains of a **Carp** by the Loch on 8th that led him to believe that an **Otter** had visited some days before and had caught and eaten most of it. He saw a single **Roe Deer** on 17th (crossing the B923 from the Loch to Gallowhill Plantation) and another one 25th, as well as **Grey Squirrel** on three occasions. **Mole** hills continued to be seen around the Loch shore.

Invertebrates ('minibeasts'): April was a far more productive month than March for invertebrate records. Twenty-seven species were found, three of them being new Loch records. Four **butterfly** species were recorded: **Peacock** on 8th and 25th, with more than five individuals seen on the earlier date; **Small White** on 8th and 26th; **Speckled Wood** on 16th at the marsh (Paul Williams); and a male **Orange-tip** seen by me on 26th. **Buff-tailed** (all month), **Common Carder** (from 11th) and **Early** (from 22nd) **bumblebees** were all seen, as well as **Buffish Mining Bee (*Andrena nigroaenea*)** and **Black Garden Ant**. Seven different **hoverflies** were

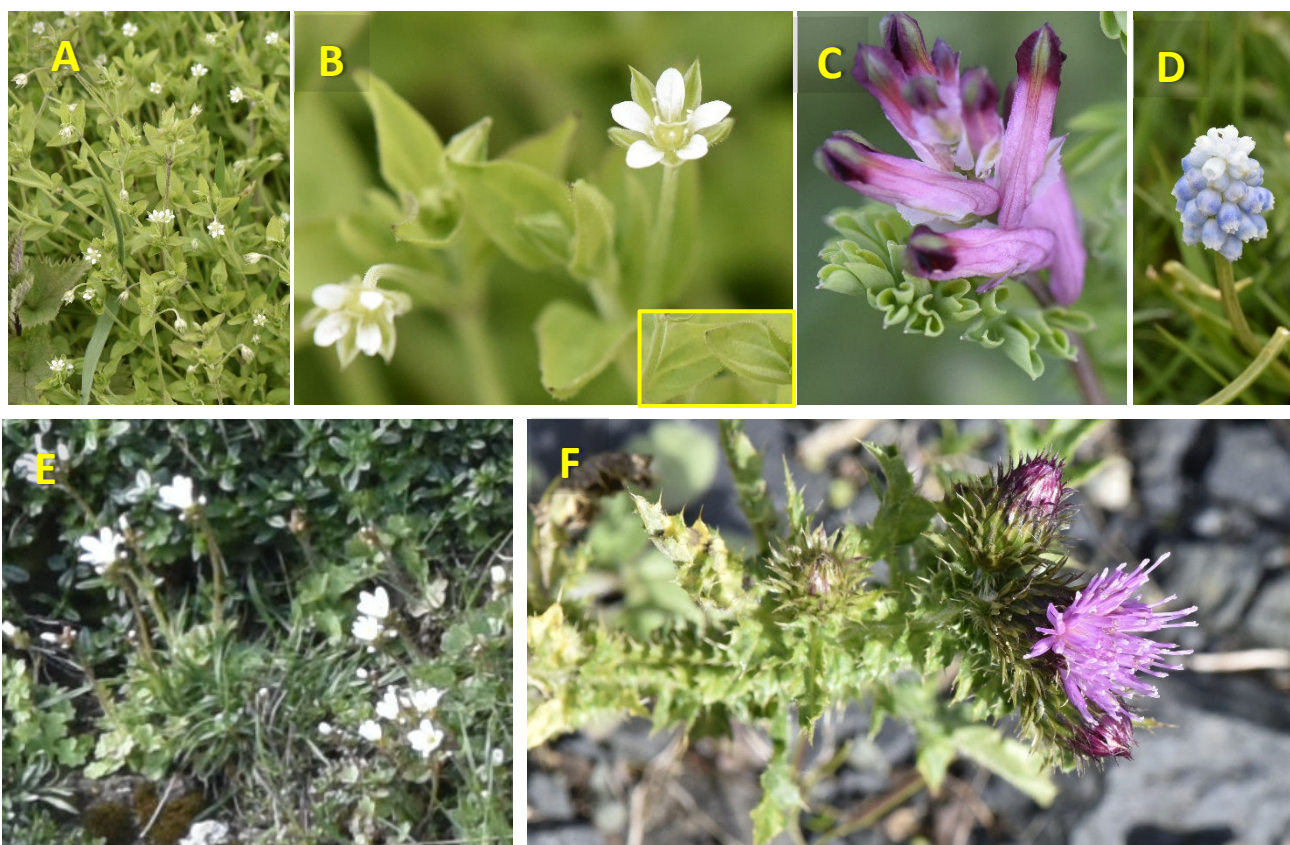


Kinghorn Loch invertebrates, April 2024. **A**, Parsley Blacklet (*Cheilosia pagana*), 11th, new Loch record. **B**, Hairy Shield-bugs (*Dolycoris baccarum*), 19th. **C**, a very dark, blackish form of Garden Snail (*Cornu aspersum*), 22nd. **D & E**, Many-tufted Sedgesitter (*Platycheirus scutatus* sensu stricto: **D**, detail of hairs on foreleg), 17th, new Loch record. **F**, Greater Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*), 26th. Photos Robert Mill.

recorded, two of them new Loch records if I have identified them correctly: **Parsley Blacklet (*Cheilosia pagana*)** on 11th and **Many-tufted Sedgesitter (*Platycheirus scutatus* s.str.)** on 17th. Both are widespread throughout the UK (even in the strict sense of the latter, which is now regarded as a species complex of three different species). The other five were **Short Melanostoma (*Melanostoma mellinum*)** on three occasions from 17th onwards, **Chequered Hoverfly (*Melanostoma scalare*)** on 17th, and **Furry Drone-fly (*Eristalis intricaria*)**, **Grey-spotted Boxer (*Platycheirus albimanus*)** and **Hairy-eyed Syrphus (*Syrphus torvus*)** all on 26th. Five other flies were also seen, of which the highlight was two **Greater Bee-flies (*Bombylius major*)** hovering in front of *Aubrieta* flowers on 26th. No fewer than five **Hairy Shield-bugs** were spotted clambering over low vegetation at the edge of the orchard on the way up to Craigenfalt Farm on 19th. Tiny black **Common Pollen Beetles** were found feeding inside dandelion flower-heads from 11th onwards, while **Seven-spot Ladybirds** were seen on both 18th and 19th. Three different **Common Alder-flies (*Sialis lutaria*)** were found on 22nd, two on different parts of the walls in the area of the jetty and the third on the bark of a tree near the bird hide, suggesting that there had been a recent emergence of adults of this species, whose larvae live underwater like those of mayflies, stoneflies and caddis-flies. A very black, white-mottled form of the very variable **Garden Snail** was found on a tree-trunk on 22nd.

Flowering plants and ferns:

85 wild or naturalised plant species were found in flower around the Loch at some time during April, twice as many as in March. They included another three new Loch records, two of them being natives (**Three-veined Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia*** on a trackside bank and probable **Dense-flowered Fumitory *Fumaria***



Flowering plants, Kinghorn Loch, April 2024. A & B, Three-veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*), 23rd, new Loch record (A, habit; B, flowers, with 3-veined leaves inset). **C**, probable Dense-flowered Fumitory (*Fumaria densiflora*), 19th, new Loch record if confirmed. **D**, Aucher-Eloy Grape-hyacinth (*Muscari aucheri*), 22nd, new Loch record. **E**, Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), 19th, some of the only truly wild plants currently known in the area surrounding the Loch. **F**, exceptionally early-flowering Welled Thistle (*Carduus crispus*), 19th. Photos Robert Mill.

densiflora on the margin of an arable field, both found on 23rd) and the third one a second **grape-hyacinth** (*Muscari*) species, **Aucher-Eloy Grape-hyacinth** (*Muscari aucheri*), in a wild situation on 22nd. As well as these new Loch records, the first truly wild population of **Meadow Saxifrage** (*Saxifraga granulata*) in the vicinity of the Loch was found on 19th; all other locations around the Loch are self-sown plants derived from others growing on two *Sedum* roofs, that on top of The Ecology Centre's building and another on a shed near the dipping pond. The wild population is on a low, inaccessible rocky calcareous outcrop that from binocular examination last year also holds populations of other base-loving plants such as Common Rock-rose and Wild Thyme. There are quite a few such outcrops in the wider Kinghorn area and each one that I have examined so far seems to have its own special mix of species. As well as the 85 species in bloom around the Loch in April, 36 other species were recorded in vegetative states or in bud, and three with old fruits, making a total of 124 wild or naturalised species found during the month. Thirty-seven cultivated plants were also noted, 34 of them in bloom. Six **fern** species were also recorded.

First-flowering dates at the Loch noted for selected flowering-plant species in April 2024, with 2023 dates in parentheses, were: **Wood Forget-me-not**, 4th (2nd); **Cowslip**, 11th (2nd); **Wild Cherry**, 2nd (same); **Spring Beauty**, 11th (17th); **Herb Robert** and **Bluebell**, 11th (21st); **Ground Ivy**, 11th (17th); **Water Avens**, 17th (11th); **Garlic Mustard**, 19th (17th); **Welled Thistle**, 19th (May 29th, almost six weeks later, and 16th June in 2022!); **Ivy-leaved Toadflax**, 19th (May 7th); **Hedge Parsley**, 22nd (May 1st); **Marsh Marigold**, 22nd (11th); **Wild Strawberry**, 23rd (same); **Welsh Poppy**, 23rd (May 1st); **Orchard Apple**, 23rd (May 7th); and **False Ivy-leaved Speedwell**, 11th (May 18th). Particularly from the middle of the month (when the weather improved), most though not all species began flowering earlier than last year. This was particularly extreme in the case of Welled Thistle, and the plants of that species flowering early at the Loch were not isolated cases, since flowering individuals of Welled Thistle were also found elsewhere in the Kinghorn area during April (see page 6).

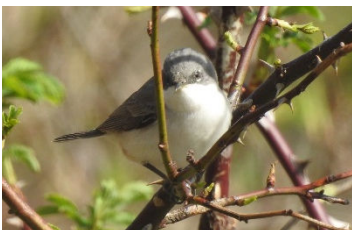
Cryptogams



Cryptogams, Kinghorn Loch, April 2024. **A**, Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*) brackets on willow tree in grid square NT2587. **B**, Warlocks Butter (*Exidia nigricans*), 4th, third Loch location and first in NT2687. **C**, Yellow Brain (*Tremella mesenterica*), 4th, third Loch location and first in NT2687; on same tree as B but lower down. **D**, Scurfy Twiglet (*Tubaria furfuracea*), 2nd site, 11th. **E**, Anomalous Brittle-moss (*Orthotrichum anomalum*), 19th. **F**, Frizzled Pincushion (*Plenogemma phyllantha*), 22nd.
Photos Robert Mill.

Eight mosses were recorded in April; two of them, **Anomalous Bristle-moss (*Orthotrichum anomalum*)** found on 19th and **Frizzled Pincushion (*Plenogemma phyllantha*)** on 22nd, were confirmations of earlier records made in 2011 although I may not have found them at the same spots as the original finders, David Chamberlain and Elizabeth Kungu of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Eight species of fungi were also recorded around the Loch during April. They included a third location for **Warlock's Butter (*Exidia nigricans*)**, this time in OS monad (1-km grid-square) NT2687 which covers the Loch's eastern shoreline and northeast corner. **Yellow Brain (*Tremella mesenterica*)** was also found on this tree, much lower down near the water of the Loch, also the first record for the Loch in NT2687 (and the third for the Loch as a whole). So, both these species have now been found in that monad as well as the other one, NT2587, that includes the main part of the Loch from the jetty westwards. Conversely, on 4th, **Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*)** was found for the first time in the western monad, NT2587, forming extensive, densely packed brackets on a willow tree. One of February's new fungal Loch records, **Scurfy Twiglet (*Tubaria furfuracea*)**, was also found at a second location (11th). Eleven or more lichen species were also re-found.

VILLAGE, BEACHES AND COASTAL PATH



Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*) beside coastal path, 15th. Photo Paul Williams.

April's bird sightings around Kinghorn were as usual mainly by Graham Sparshott (GS), Paul Williams (PW) and myself, with additional ones by Bruce Meldrum, Hilary McGuire and Tim Nicholson on the KDWG Facebook page.

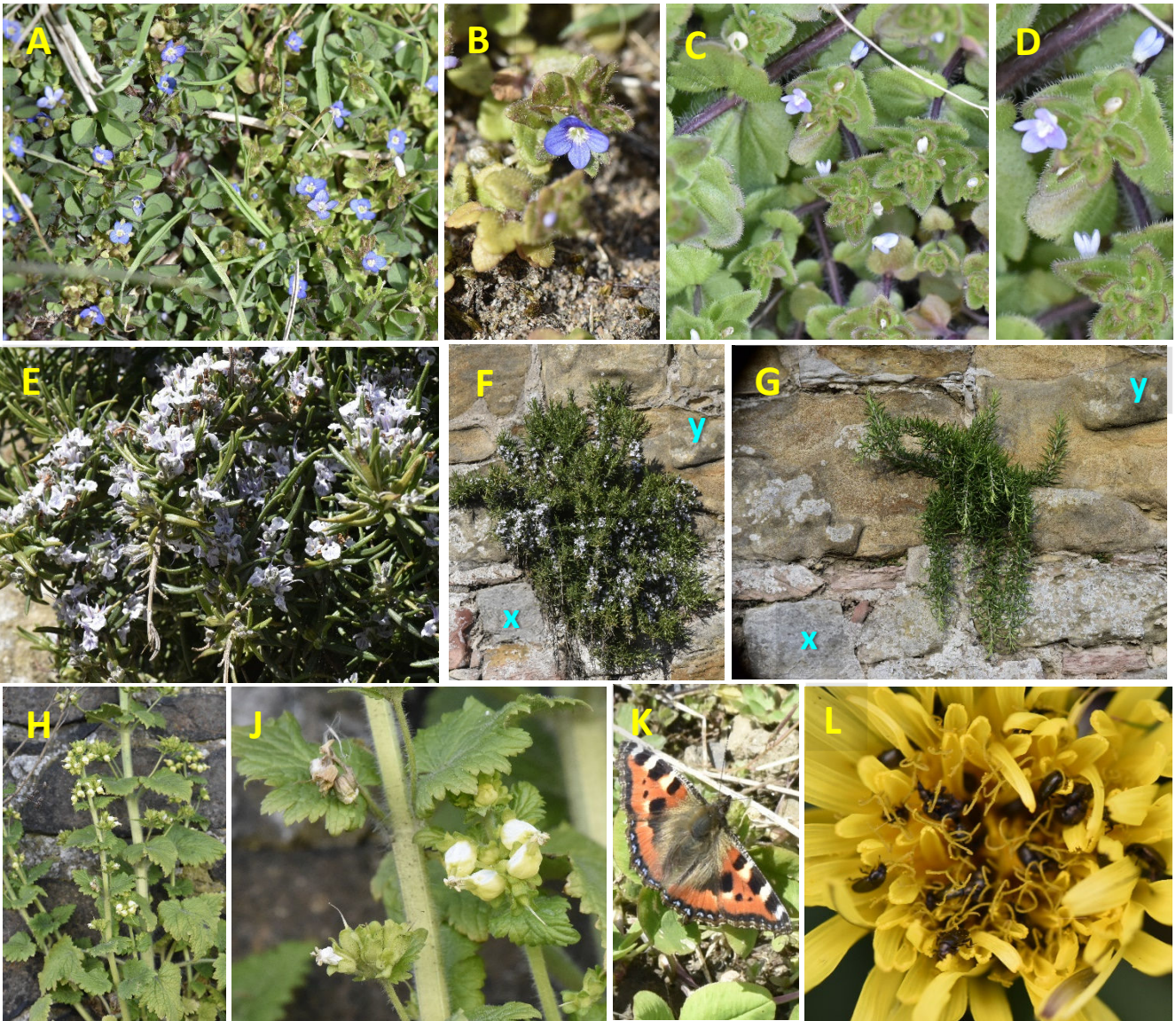
The month's 'star bird' has to be a female **Marsh Harrier** that was seen by Fife bird recorder, Graham Sparshott, on 14th; it flew in from the coast and headed northeastwards low across fields adjacent to Red Path Brae. Another really good record was a **Grasshopper Warbler** that was heard 'reeling' by the coastal path at Easter Braes by Paul Williams on 29th. Hopefully it will settle down and find a mate. This is the second recent record from East Braes;

Graham Sparshott recorded one that had just arrived in the same area on 17 April 2022. There were plenty of other interesting bird sightings during April. On a walk down the Mire Path on 19th, I flushed a couple of **Grey Partridges** from the woodland next to me and they flew into the big Mid Mire field. Paul Williams saw two **Red-legged Partridges** in the field opposite the Whinnyhall site. The last two records of **Pink-footed Geese** heading back to Arctic summer breeding grounds were of 22 on 14th and 32 on 19th, both by Graham Sparshott. Surprisingly, a couple of **Long-tailed Ducks** were still lingering at Seafield as late as 26th (Paul Williams). The month's most spectacular 'duck event' was a gradual buildup of **Common Scoters** off East Braes from 12th, when 350 were present (GS), to more than 400 on 15th (PW), more than 550 on 17th (PW), 750 on 19th (GS) and finally peaking at 800 on 19th (GS), after which flock sizes dramatically decreased so that there were only a maximum of 50-60 in the last week of the month. A few **Shelducks** were on Pettycur sands on 18th (Tim Nicholson) and six **Wigeon** were at Seafield on 25th (PW). I heard a **Stock Dove** singing in the grounds of Grangehill House on 23rd. **Red-throated Divers** were off East Braes on four occasions and a single **Great Northern Diver** was also there on 21st (GS). My wife counted at least 20 **Fulmars** on the cliff at Kinghorn beach on 24th. Small numbers of **Gannets** were off East Braes, Kinghorn and Pettycur on various dates from 16th onwards (Paul Williams, Bruce Meldrum and myself). Notable **wader** records included three **Golden Plover** heading NE over Red Path Brae on 14th (GS), single **Bar-tailed** and **Black-tailed Godwits** at Seafield on 23rd and 15th respectively (PW) and 30 **Purple Sandpipers** there on 28th (also PW). Small numbers (2 to 5 individuals) of **Sandwich Terns** were seen from 12th onwards. A **Puffin** was off East Braes on 7th (GS). Paul Williams saw a **Peregrine** at Seafield on 17th. **Sand Martins** actually arrived in the Kinghorn area on 7th, when Graham Sparshott saw one coming in off the coastal path at East Braes, and **House Martins**, as well as **Willow Warblers**, were seen by him on 14th at Red Path Brae – both these dates are earlier than when all these species were first recorded at the Loch and probably better reflect their true arrival dates. However, Nigel Voaden's record of a **Blackcap** at the Loch on 7th is a week earlier than any local report from outside the Loch recording area. A **Lesser Whitethroat** was seen and heard by PW along the coast path near Kinghorn (15th, 23rd and 27th) and he noted a second one at Seafield on 27th, as well as a **Common Whitethroat** on the Kinghorn-Seafield Tower stretch of coastal path on 29th. **Wheatears** were seen at Grangehill by PW (25th) and at Seafield by Tim Nicholson (30th). As well as many of these incoming summer visitors, Graham Sparshott noted a lingering **Redwing** at Red Path Brae on 14th.

Bruce Meldrum saw a **Harbour Porpoise** off Kinghorn on 23rd but there no notable records of land mammals from the Kinghorn area during April.

Four **butterfly** species were recorded around Kinghorn during April, all but one of them only in the final week when the weather was at its best. By far the most notable was a **Holly Blue** found by Paul Williams on the coastal path at Kinghorn caravan park on 27th. This appears to be the first record of Holly Blue from Kinghorn – there are no records from our area in NBN Atlas, the nearest being a May 2010 record from Kirkcaldy (NBN Atlas, 2024). The larval food plants are Holly and Ivy, and there does happen to be a big patch of ivy at the caravan park, but obviously one would need at least two butterflies (one male and one female) before a colony could begin to form near there. The other three species recorded were **Small Tortoiseshell** seen by me on the Burnside Path (16th) and by the east side of the golf course (23rd); **Orange Tip** on the coast path (23rd and 27th, Paul Williams) and also seen by me at Grangehill (23rd), Mid Mire (24th) and Burnside Path (27th); and **Peacock** (one at Grangehill Farm on 23rd, three sightings on the coast path by Paul Williams on 23rd, 25th and 27th). **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** and **Common Carder Bees** were recorded by me in various places from 16th till the end of the month, as well as a **Honey Bee** on a dandelion flower-head by the Burnside Path on 26th.

During a long walk along the coastal path from Kinghorn to Seafield and back on 16th, the established colony of **Summer Snowflake** was again flowering near the beach below Linton Court, and a week later on 23rd I re-found the plants of the same species I found in the Grangehill and Lower Grangehill areas last year. Along the track westwards across the golf course on 23rd, I noticed a tiny procumbent speedwell species with very small deep blue flowers and rather greyish leaves with which I was unfamiliar. This turned out to be **Grey Field-speedwell (*Veronica polita*)**; the only previous record from the Kinghorn area appears to be that made in 1862 by John Hutton Balfour, 7th Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (see Young, 1936: p.



Plants and insects, Kinghorn area, April 2024. A & B, Grey Field-speedwell (*Veronica polita*), golf course track, 23rd. **C & D,** Green Field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*), Doo Dell, 27th – note paler blue flowers than A & B. **E & F,** Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), harbour wall (presumably self-sown), 27th; **G,** same plant in October 2022. Blue letters **x** and **y** in photos F & G indicate the same two stones of the harbour wall to give an indication of how much the plant has grown in 18 months. **H & J,** Yellow Figwort (*Scrophularia vernalis*), wall in village, 27th. **K,** Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Burnside Path, 16th. **L,** Many small black Common Pollen Beetles (*Brassicogethes aeneus*), coastal path, 16th. Photos Robert Mill.

111 as *V. didyma*). It is good to know that this species still survives in our area over 160 years later. A few days later (27th), I found its commoner relative, **Green Field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*)**, with paler sky-blue flowers usually with one whitish petal, beside one of the paths in the Doo Dell network.

On the coast path walk on 16th I also found the coastal dwarf form of **Common Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*)** growing together with **Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*)**. On 19th, as part of a longer walk that took in part of Kinghorn Loch, I visited the Mire Path as well as the limestone outcrop beside Kissing Trees Lane just north of the track to Craigencaht Cottage. At both ends of the outcrop, but not on the outcrop itself, I found patches of **Spring Beauty (*Claytonia perfoliata*)**. By the Mire Path on 19th, unusually early flowering of **Wetted Thistle** (as mentioned in the Loch section of this report) was noted, as well as beside Kinghorn golf course on 23rd. Also on 19th, a third plant of **Stinking Iris (*Iris foetidissima*)** was found along Mire Path besides the two previously known ones; all had a few fruits remaining. My walk by the golf course and onwards to Grangehill and the B923 on 23rd probably yielded the greatest variety of plants. Besides the Grey Field-speedwell mentioned earlier, both **Common Whitlow-grass (*Erophila verna sensu stricto*)** and

Glabrous Whitlow-grass (*Erophila glabrescens*) were found in different places, as well as **Wild Strawberry, Yellow Archangel, Bugloss, Early Forget-me-not, Field Pansy** and numerous others. On 27th, **Herb Bennet** was in flower on the Doo Dell paths, while on the same day on a wall in the village I found a single plant of **Yellow Figwort (*Scrophularia vernalis*)**, the only one I have seen locally other than some at Pettycur. The **Rosemary** plant growing out of the harbour wall, which I first mentioned in my October 2022 report, was in full flower on 27th, the first time I have seen any flowers on it. It has grown considerably since I first noticed it about 18 months ago (see photos F and G on previous page).

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