

Dear Friends,

Wildlife Notes 43, January 22nd 2024.

It's time to catch up with our wildlife for 2024, and already it has been quite a challenging year for them all. Actually, the hard frost, with no wind or rain is much easier for them in general, than when it is pouring rain and blowing a gale, as it is as I write this. We were lucky in this part of the world to get just a light covering of snow, which was perfect for seeing tracks and signs of animals. Deer tracks were everywhere in the woods, and I even saw them coming up the putting path and into Burnturk! Pheasants are quite common in the woods and again, it is easy to see their tracks. Pheasants do like to walk and to stay on the ground where they search for grass seeds and nuts such as beech nuts, but they are also very strong fliers and can take off vertically when they are disturbed, their leaping take-off matched only by my leaping heart if they come up from under my feet!

Coming back to Roe Deer, there have been at least 2 road casualties that I know of, and they have very quickly been eaten by our other woodland residents. I think badgers must scavenge the carcasses a lot, as I don't think anything else would be able to move a whole roe deer about so much. One carcass was moved over 10m while it was still almost intact! I also disturbed a buzzard from one of the deer, but it just went up into a nearby tree and came down to feed again as soon as I was out of the way.

This has been a very good year for visitors from Scandinavia, as apparently the berry crop over there was used up very quickly. So, as well as large numbers of Fieldfares and Redwing, which I have spoken about before, we have been lucky enough to have quite a few parties of Crossbills passing through the area. I've seen them twice over Eastwood, though when I say I saw them, it was really hearing them which identified them for me. They have a very distinctive sound and I recommend you have a listen on google ([Crossbill Bird Facts | Loxia Curvirostra \(rspb.org.uk\)](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-animals/bird-facts/bird-fact-articles/crossbill-bird-facts/)), so if you hear them you know what they are. They are absolutely amazing little birds, the male is bright red and the female is green and if you get a good view through binoculars, they are like little parrots in the trees. I've attached an absolutely super photo which Margaret Ronaldson took at Kinshaldy



yesterday. These Scandinavian crossbills are a different species from the Scottish Crossbill, which is Scotland's only endemic bird. This means it is found nowhere else in the whole world! Even

in Scotland, it is only found in the remnants of the Caledonian pine forest which used to cover most of northern and western Scotland, so now you really need to look around Aviemore and the Cairngorms to see them. These Scottish crossbills tend to stay in the Highlands and it is not them we are seeing here.

If you look carefully at the photo, you can see that the bill is crossed over, which allows them to prise open pine cones and spruce cones, to reach the seeds inside, which are their main source of food.

Finally, and with another photo, there is a unique robin living in Kettlehill, one which is pale peach coloured instead of red and brown.



This is not a bad photo! It is the actual colour of the robin, which has been seen in a few gardens and on the Cowdens. This colour variation is known as leucistic, where the bird still has some colour, but very diluted from its normal colour. If it was pure white it would be an albino. Apparently the local “normal” robins are not chasing this one as it is the red colour which they respond to, when they chase off all other robins. It will be interesting to see if this robin manages to find a mate and raise a family in the Spring, if it stays around. Please let me know if you come across it and especially if it settles and finds a mate.

Alison