

I thought I'd start these notes with a bit of a sad thought about all the trees which we have lost again in the storm last week. Lots of big spruce trees came down and blocked the roads, but it is particularly sad to see two lovely beeches and a magnificent oak come down in the beech woods. It has made me think again about the lack of young trees coming up in our area. Every year there numerous beech, oak, ash, birch and many other species seedlings germinate, but almost none of them are able to get past the height where they are eaten by deer. Many years ago, I tried to put tree guards on young beech trees coming up in the beech woods, but they never lasted, mostly thanks to human intervention, I think! Throughout the woods in Burnturk, Cults and Drummies, there are so many trees with tops snapped off or up-rooted! I remember at my university course (which included forestry) that we were told that in a healthy wood, at least half the trees should be standing or fallen dead wood, but that was always on the proviso that there were numerous young trees coming up through the ground vegetation. That doesn't seem to be happening here.

Looking for a bit of a silver lining in this gloom about trees (!), I've noticed several areas where people used to walk which are now a totally impenetrable jungle of fallen trees, which will provide a safe haven for wildlife such as nesting birds and small mammals. These quiet corners are invaluable for the shyer species to succeed.

I've received some interesting reports and videos recently. Tommy at Eastwood sent me a super video of a stoat in its pure white winter coat running in his garden. It was very conspicuous – hoping for some snowy weather I expect! When they are in their full winter coat like this, they are known as an Ermine, pure white but still with the black tip to its tail to let you know it is a stoat and not a weasel.

On a recent Scottish Wildlife Trust walk round Downfield farm we found a badger skull, dug out of the ground at a big sett. One of the SWT members, a retired vet, was able to deduce from the skull, that the badger had bone degradation in its jaw, and he said it had likely died from a bone infection from a deep bite wound, or possibly been hit by a car. It's amazing what you can find out!

Despite the storm, I am hearing lots of birds beginning to sing and it sometimes feels as if Spring is not very far away. Great Tits are singing, as are Robins, Mistle Thrush and occasional Blue tit songs too. I've had Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming everywhere, and, a good record – a Green Woodpecker yaffling in the Milldeans woods. Many years ago we had green woodpeckers more regularly than the Great Spotted, and they even nested for several years in the beech woods. Generally they are considered to be a more southern species. It would be great if they were making a comeback.

Another species moving north, which has even reached Balbirnie Park in Markinch, is the Nuthatch. I was on holiday in Ayrshire in November and Nuthatches were everywhere, so I have memorised their distinctive call! As soon as I hear one in Burnturk, which I predict will be this year, I will let you know. In fact, lets make it our community challenge to see who spots them in Burnturk or Cults area first!



*Nuthatch*

Alison