

Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust

Newsletter

Winter - January 2025



SCO 044045

Editorial

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2025—the third newsletter we have produced. We hope that you enjoy reading them and find them informative and interesting — we welcome any feedback!

Since the Autumn newsletter the weather has been very variable. The mild November brought out many fungi, but this was followed by a very cold spell which caused them to disappear as quickly as they appeared. We plan to arrange a fungal foray and other nature walks this year. Please keep an eye on our FB page for information on forthcoming events.

Because CLLCT is a community project we would welcome items from our members for our future issues of the newsletter. You can send your articles to the email address below.

Our Habitats Officer, Rhonda, has been busy liaising with other organisations to organise surveys of the plants, birds and animals present in and around the loch.

Editor—Freda Seddon

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February 18th at 2.30pm Church Hall, Lochmaben

Rhonda will be giving a talk about Castle Loch, for the Church Guild.

Everyone is welcome to come along.

Darren's Presentation

In December The Trust had a get together to present the previous Project Manager Darren Flint with a painting commissioned by local artist Alayne Smith. The painting was of the Castle Loch and was presented to Darren to commemorate his work in setting up the CLLCT and the volunteer group. The presentation took place in the company of many other significant figures involved in the key development of the Trust and Castle Loch. It was great to see Darren and to meet and catch up with everyone.



Alayne Smith, the artist, with her painting and Darren at the presentation

Contacts for Castle Lochmaben Community Trust -

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Habitat Officer's Report and Volunteer Work

Coming into winter the volunteers at Castle Loch have been addressing the pathways through Kirkhirst Wood as well as the path along the side of the A709. Having covered most of the pathways with woodchip, our next concern has been to address unfavourable access points to promote access for all around the loch. We are keen to refine any difficult areas and reduce any uneven camber in order to promote wheeled access for all, as much as we can.

Further to this, the volunteers have been involved in a seasonal litter pick with increased visibility due to the die back of summer growth. A lot of litter making its way into the Castle Loch is from the roadside; however we continue to have issues with users not picking up dog waste, fishermen's bait bags, tissues and such like.

We have seen a great variety of season fungal blooms this year which has been helpful in extending my knowledge with different habitats to observe, supporting a wide variety of different species. Species include the blushing bracket, yellow brain, field blewit and many more. My favourite being the amethyst deceiver.



Amethyst Deceiver

Visiting birds so far have included the great white egret, crested grebes, the usual goldeneyes and tufted ducks as well as some pochard. Our regular visitors at this time of year also include an increased number of goosanders and coots which is great to see along with our resident mute swan population. The ever-elusive Kingfisher has been spotted around the Castle area.



Field blewit



Yellow brain fungus



Blushing bracket

Winter Flowering Plants

An annual 'Winter flowering plant hunt' is undertaken by the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland BSBI. It is open to anyone to join as a 'Citizen Science' project, whether as individuals or as part of organised groups. Hunts are for no more than just a couple of hours and held during the last four days in December. Details of the format and the results from this nation-wide survey are available on the BSBI website . <https://nyph.bsbi.org/>

Members of Castle Loch Trust have taken part in the last two winter hunts, the results were:

2023:

Alder *Alnus glutinosa*
 Daisy *Bellis perennis*
 Gorse *Ulex europaeus*
 Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*

Meadow-grasses *Poa* spp.

2024:

Alder *Alnus glutinosa*
 Daisy *Bellis perennis*
 Gorse *Ulex europaeus*
 Common & Atlantic Ivy
Hedera helix
 Dandelions *Taraxacum* spp.
 Snowdrops *Galanthus nivalis*

Note that these are plants seen flowering during the winter—full plant surveys have been carried out and the results are available to anyone who is interested - Contact Rhonda (see front page for contact details)

My Experience as a Volunteer at Castle loch

I started volunteering at Castle loch in 2021 after the lockdown due to the Corona virus. I had been volunteering in other capacities but always enjoyed being outdoors, including cycling and walking, so when I received a newsletter through my front door with information about volunteering at Castle Loch I was instantly interested in joining the team of volunteers. I had previously taken part in a training course at Castle Douglas, held by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, so I had an idea of the kind of work that lay ahead, but previous experience is not a requirement for volunteers.

Becoming a volunteer at Castle loch means that you can help to make a difference in the lives of the many people who use this area. Whether they are walking to keep themselves fit and active, or walking the dog, their safety and enjoyment is a priority.

From my experience volunteering at Castle loch has been good for my mental health and wellbeing. It is a pleasant atmosphere to work in, with a very friendly team of volunteers, led by our Habitat officer, Rhonda Graham, who knows what work has to be done on that specific day, and the choice of tasks that volunteers can carry out.

There is always a welcome break mid-way through the morning, where refreshments in the form of tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits, are provided, and some lively discussions take place.



Volunteering can help to fill any gaps that you may have in your CV, and shows any prospective employer that you are currently actively taking part in a worthwhile activity which will benefit the local community.

Volunteering is what you make it. If, like myself, you find yourself unemployed for some reason, you could choose to put the minimum amount of effort into volunteering, or get interested in the various projects that are being carried out at Castle Loch, and enjoy the beauty that the loch and the surrounding countryside have to offer.

Alan McCaig

Alan with the new strimmer -
generously provided by Nairn Construction

Pochard (*Aythya farina*)

This beautifully coloured relative of the tufted duck was once present across all but the far north of the UK all year round and its numbers were swelled by winter migrants. It is almost a silent bird with just the females emitting a harsh 'kerrr' sound. It is a diving duck that feeds on plants, seeds and snails, small fish and insects. Its current conservation status is red as numbers are declining. Over the past 40 years numbers have fallen by over one fifth. There are now thought to be less than 700 breeding pairs here.

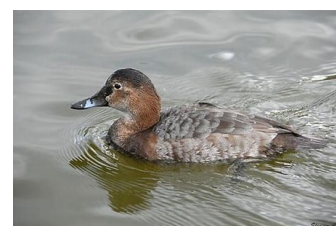
The warmer weather in their European breeding grounds means that the lakes are not as frozen so the duck doesn't need to make the arduous journey across the North Sea and so stays closer to home. However winter is still the best time to see them and on the late November wildlife walk we were able to count 4 of them in the duck numbers on Castle Loch.

Thank you to Helen Keen (Secretary CLLCT) for this article. Helen obtained information from several sources, including RSPB and BTO websites.



Male pochard

The male pochard is a very smart looking diving duck, the female lacking the chestnut head and white flanks. Although common in Scotland it is rarely recorded at the Lochmaben lochs, so you can imagine the surprise when 4 were spotted on the loch at the end of November. Pochard dive for vegetable matter but can also be seen feeding on the surface and usually prefer fresh water.



Female pochard

Editor

Viewing Platforms

The Trustees at Castle Loch and our band of willing Volunteers are continually working to maintain the pathways and the infrastructure around Castle Loch. During our regular work party sessions we hear many appreciative comments and praise for these works and we hope these are continued to be heard.

One aspect that the Trust has inherited is the maintenance of the two Accessibility Platforms that look out over the Loch, where hopefully closer views at the water's edge can be safely approached by all. These hard-surfaced platforms have a level approach from the roadside and were installed under direction from Dumfries & Galloway Council. They are located at the carpark adjacent to Lochfield Cottage, off the A709 road to Lockerbie, and the smaller platform off the B7020 road to Dalton, near Vendace Burn and Cottage.

Over the years, the weather, water and wave action have combined to show some deterioration in both these structures. This has been monitored by the Trust, who are now acting to halt and stabilise further damage before this becomes more critical.



Recent walkers around the loch may have seen works at the Platform by the Dalton Road being undertaken by David Hardie Engineering Co. Ltd. of Dum-

fries. Support to the barrier railings at the Loch-side, here was becoming vulnerable. We are now happy to report that this has now been reinforced and repaired. The access path to the Platform from the layby has also been cleared for a smoother approach from the roadside. The photos show the repaired platform.



The Trust is also in the process of seeking funding for the cost of some preventative repairs to the larger Lockerbie Road platform (by the car park) which is still fully functioning and accessible. We hope to be able to undertake works there in the Spring 2025, when water levels will (hopefully) be lower.

The Trust acts on behalf of the Membership - which is free and is open to all residents of Lochmaben and the

surrounding district, and regular users of the site. We welcome comments and suggestions for how our work can be directed. If you have thoughts or ideas for the site and its use, please do not hesitate to share these with us by contacting any Trustee or our Habitat Officer, Rhonda Graham, at Lochfield Cottage.

Please note that your membership, although free, does show your support for the Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust. Members also receive the quarterly newsletter. If you live in Lochmaben, Templand, the Royal Four Towns or the surrounding district, you are eligible for membership. Just contact any Trustee, or Rhonda at Lochfield Cottage, if you or someone you know wishes to become a member. (or see first page for contact details)

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