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Welcome to our 1st e-newsletter of 2022

Lots of things have happened since our autumn 2021 newsletter, some of it exciting and new, but also sadly, quite a few weather based challenges that have caused significant damage to the cottage and nature reserve paths. In these days of increasingly frequent weather events it's something we just have to deal with and keep working away at.

The loch has continued to be a popular place for walking and exercise during these months of Covid worries and restrictions. On an average year our people counter, which counts numbers doing the full circuit of the loch, registers around 22,000 pairs of boots on the ground, last year that figure was just over 35,000.

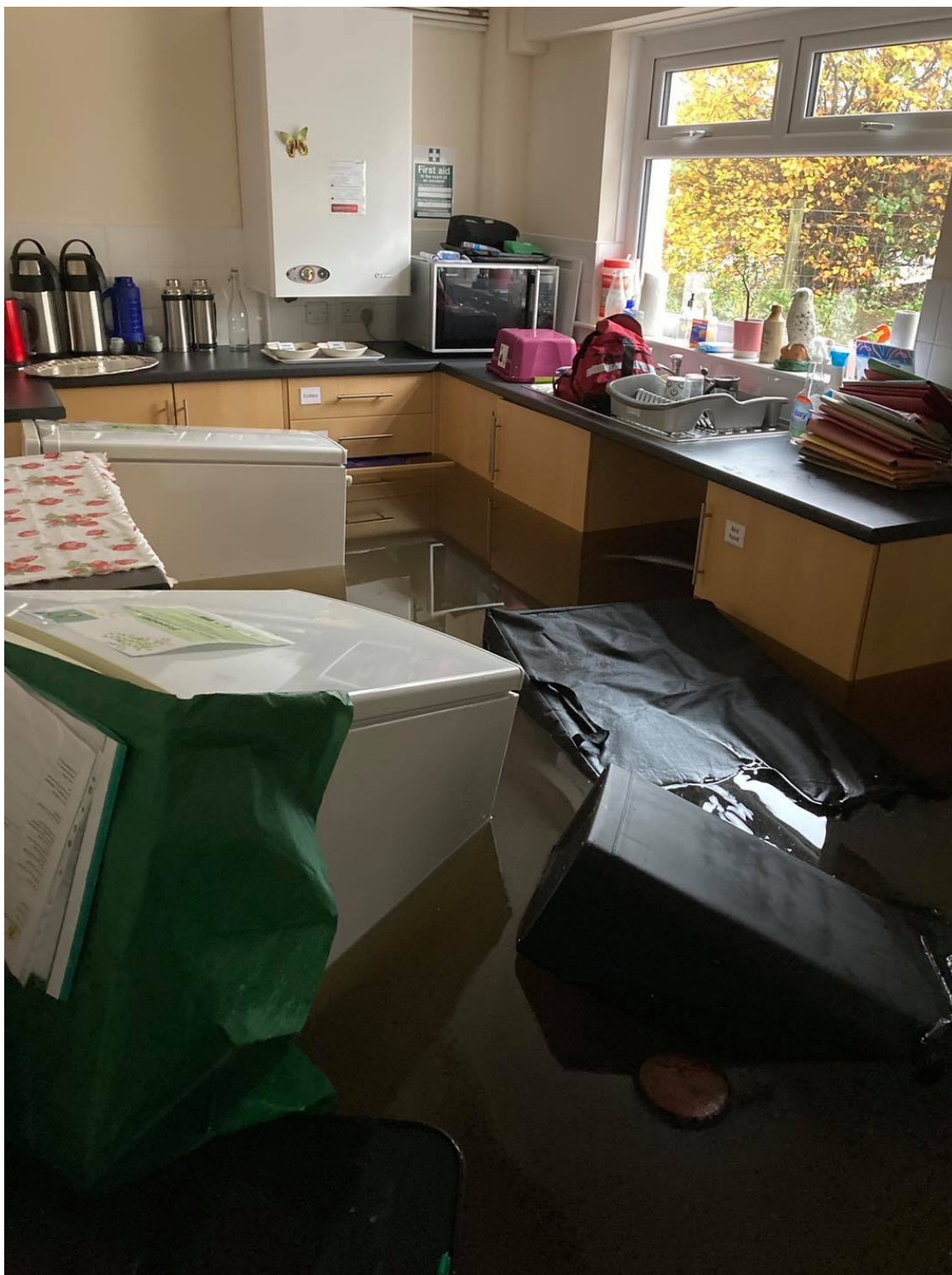
Along with the usual upkeep and maintenance across the site, the community has...

- Dealt with the flood damage and loss of equipment at Lochfield Cottage
- Repaired flood damaged paths and bridges
- Started a fundraising campaign to replace the old boardwalk
- Completed lots of funding bids and undergone scary phone interviews
- Litter picked numerous times all the road verges and laybys...

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Project Updates



Flooding & Storms

Despite lifting things off the floor of the charity's office base at Lochfield Cottage and putting in the flood protection gates the waters rose too much and came in to about 2.5ft up the walls. Once the water had subsided, we found three of our bridges had been washed out of position, paths damaged and some £18k worth of damage in the cottage to equipment, electrics and the fabric of the building.

A big thank you goes out to all the volunteers that helped with the clean-up operation of both the cottage and the reserve's paths. Thank you also to Ross Gemmell from the D&G Council's Ranger Service for help with getting the washed away bridges back in place.

The cottage remains currently out of action and the dehumidifier running 24/7, but we hope to have things back to normal for the spring. In time for running our events and welcoming school classes back.



Volunteering:

We suspended volunteering during the early part of 2022 to see how the Covid-19

- to fix potholes on the castle approach track, ramp up in to the castle and non-slip treads on the fishing platform
- then over to Kirkhirst Wood to finish the path edging repairs and surface patching
- put up owl, bird of prey, bat and woodland bird boxes

If you would like to join us for our friendly volunteering parties or able to help out with fundraising and events, please email darrenflint@castleloch.org.uk



Tree management:

As a woodland site and one with large areas of wet woodland, tree maintenance is a constant, ongoing, and expensive affair. Late 2021 we hosted our second chainsaw training course, which provides the students with an interesting training site, while we benefit from having some of our urgent tree maintenance tasks undertaken for free. During early 2022 the annual tree safety survey will be undertaken by TreeSurv, which will keep us informed of the latest necessary works. We don't aim to have a manicured and tidy nature reserve, that isn't so good for wildlife. Plenty of rotting wood is great for insects and fungi, and in turn the birds and animals that live on them. Instead, we undertake those works close to the footpaths that potentially pose a risk to our visitors and/or aid the longevity of the tree.

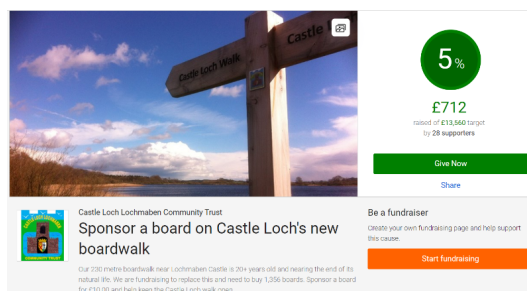
Where possible our volunteers help out with clearing debris and chipping, to try to keep overall costs down. If you would like to financially support our site works please visit [Donate](#) | [Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust](#)

AGM

Diary date. The next Castle Loch AGM is planned for Tuesday 29th March at 7.30pm in the Church Hall. Lochmaben. Hopefully, this will go ahead in person, but we will keep an eye on the Covid situation and confirm details nearer the time. Last year we had to move it to a Zoom meeting last minute. We usually have a short talk about nature or history linked to the loch - if you have any suggestions for a speaker, please do let us know.

Board member vacancies...

A couple of the present trustees will be standing down at the AGM, so we will be looking for new faces to come and be part of the Board and actively get involved in the running of the community owned project. Particular skills we are looking for are fundraising, people engagement, helping plan and run events. A big thank you goes out to Hazel, Muriel and Ian for all their hard work and support over the last few years.



Fundraising

Castle Loch is one of Scotland's oldest Local Nature Reserves and was purchased by the community for the community and its visitors in 2014. Since then, new paths have been made, woodland purchased to extend the reserve, children's play area and forest schools created, the volunteers have won many awards (including the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Services), habitats managed and restored, and loads of school and adult groups been welcomed.

Some 35k pairs of boots are completing the 5km circular walk each year and we are currently running a big fundraising campaign to replace the old boardwalk and upgrade some of the bridges and path surfaces. This will hopefully take place next autumn/winter and help keep the paths open and usable for many years to come.

We had an infrastructure audit undertaken by Paths for All who identified the key pieces of work, and this has a total cost of just over £100k. We are busy

Our **JustGiving sponsor a board for the boardwalk** is now live, and at the time of sending this the amount raised stood at £712. If you would like to support the work, please visit the below link to donate – thank you. Alternatively, scan the below QR code or there is a cash donation post located by the bench outside Lochfield Cottage, near the Lockerbie road car park.

www.justgiving.com/campaign/castlelochboardwalk



Naturewatch...



Recent sightings at the nature reserve

During the winter months the loch waters become the main focus for bird sightings. Recent spots are bittern, whopper swan, tufted ducks, wigeon, teal, goldeneye, greylag and pink-footed geese, great-white egret... Do let us know if you see anything unusual or first of the season.

Naturewatch...what to look out for over the next few months

Winter Trees

Winter offers a unique time to get up close and study the wonder of trees. With no leaves on the broadleaf species, you can get a good look at the branches, the colours, any fruits such as catkins and early buds. All of which provide clues to the species. Don't forget to also look at the vibrant green mosses and bright yellow lichens.

Goldeneye

During the summer this duck is mainly confined to the Highlands, where, since the 1970s, they now nest. However, in winter they spread their wings and join other migrants from the continent to inhabit lakes and sheltered coastal areas.

It is a medium sized diving duck. The males look black and white with a greenish black head and the tell-tale circular white patch in front of the yellow eye. Females are smaller, and are mottled grey with a chocolate brown head.

As we head in to early spring the long, damp winter will hopefully be starting to become a distant memory and it will be time to listen out for renewed bird song and drumming.

Bird song and drumming

Other than the ever-vocal robin, birdsong tends to disappear through the colder months and it makes a welcome return as the temperatures begin to rise. Listen out

You might also hear the drumming of a great spotted woodpecker on a nearby tree. With a bit of luck, you will also be treated to a flash of black and white feathers, complete with a bright red rump, as it flies by. The males also have a red patch on the back of their head. They are a regular visitor to the peanut feeder at Lochfield Cottage (A709 car park).

Catkins on willow

Early Spring means there are few flowers in bloom, which makes life difficult for those insects that awaken or hatch with the first warm days of the year. The catkins on goat willow, also known as sallow and pussy willow (as the silky grey male flowers look like cat's paws), provide a valuable nectar source for insects.

Support Castle Loch Nature Reserve

The community owned nature reserve relies on the kind funding and donations from a range of funding bodies and individuals. During the year we have received regular donations from kind individual supporters as well as from Russell Roof Tiles, Gates Power Transmission, Lochmaben Community Council and Cllr Doug Fairbairn via the local priorities of the Area Committee Discretionary Budget. A big thank you for all the support

If you would like to financially support the work at Castle Loch you can do so at www.castleloch.org.uk/getting-involved/donate/



And finally...

Happy Valentine's Day - thank you to Halina Neil for this aerial shot of the loch really

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